

THE OKLAHOMA BANDITS THE DALTONS





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THE OKLAHOMA BANDITS

THE DALTONS

AND THEIR DESPERATE GANG

By CLARENCE E. RAY

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The Oklahoma Bandits

CHAPTER I.

CRIMINAL CAREER OF THE GANG

The Dalton family was composed of five boys and three girls. Of the boys, two are farmers, one in Oklahoma, where the mother lives, and one near Coffeyville. The Daltons were second cousins of the famous James boys, and through them were related to the Youngers, who are now serving life terms of imprisonment in Minnesota. Bob Dalton, the first of the boys to enter on a career of crime, was a cattle thief in the Cherokee strip while yet a boy. He was joined soon after by his brother Grat-tan, and they took to train and stage robbing in California. A stage passenger was killed in one attack, and Grat. Dalton was captured, but rescued by the gang. In 1889, when Oklahoma was open to settlement, the Dalton boys secured a choice claim for their mother, and Bob acted as a United States marshal.

The gang was added to by Emmet Dalton and Dick Broadwell, and they began to rob trains and kill right and left. The most noted of their train robberies are those of the Santa Fe at Wharton, and at Red Rock, the Missouri Pacific at Adair, and the Frisco near Vinita. In the Wharton robbery the station operator was killed in a cold-blood-

ed way, and Ed Bryant, one of the gang who was captured, killed Deputy United States Marshal Short with a revolver in his manacled hands, but the the murderer's career was ended by the dying officer. The Adair robbery, which was committed in the center of the town, resulted in the death of two physicians, who were hit by stray bullets during the battle with the express car guards.

After the Frisco robbery the Daltons began to rob banks. They first attacked the bank at El Reno. The only person inside was the wife of the president, who fainted at sight of the revolvers. The bandits took all the money in sight and escaped. This raid netted them \$10,000, and the bank was forced into liquidation.

But this gang of daring outlaws, train-robbers and murderers, the terror of the Western plains since the days of the Jesse James gang, were destined to a speedy extermination at the hands of a marshal's posse. Five of the gang rode into the town of Coffeyville, Kansas, on the morning of October 5, 1892, and robbed the two banks of the place. Their raid had become known to the officers of the law, and when the bandits attempted to escape they were attacked by the marshal's posse.

In the battle which ensued, three of the desperadoes were killed outright, and Emmet Dalton was so badly wounded that he was thought to be dying. The other desperado escaped for the time being, but was afterward killed by a pistol shot from the revolver of a young lad named T. N. Rus-

sell while flying past the back of the lot owned by young Russell's father.

Of the attacking party, four were killed and three were seriously wounded. Names of the killed:

Robert Dalton, desperado, shot through the head; Grattan Dalton, desperado, shot through the heart; Bill Powers, desperado, shot through the head; Dick Broadwell, desperado, shot through the abdomen; Charles T. Connelly, city marshal, shot through the body; L. M. Baldwin, bank clerk, shot through the head; George W. Cubine, merchant, shot through the head; Charles J. Brown, shoemaker, shot through the body.

Names of the wounded: Emmet Dalton, desperado, buckshot wound in left side; Thomas G. Ayers, cashier of the First National Bank, shot through the groin; T. A. Reynolds, of the attacking party, wounded in the right breast; Lais Detz, of the attacking party, shot in the right side; wound serious, but not fatal.

It had been rumored a month previously that the Dalton gang contemplated an immediate raid upon the banks of the city. Arrangements were made to give them a warm reception and for over a week a patrol was maintained night and day to give warning of the gang's approach. The raid did not take place, and then came the report from Deming, N. M., that United States officers had had a battle with the gang in that territory and three of the bandits had been killed. This report was believed to have been circulated by the Daltons themselves

to divert attention from their plans and lull the people of the town into a sense of security. The people, however, were not so easily deceived and when the New Mexico report was denied vigilance was renewed. Still the expected raid was not made and the patrol was withdrawn, although every stranger was carefully scrutinized as soon as he appeared on the streets.

It was half past nine o'clock in the morning when the Dalton gang rode into town. They came in two squads of three each, and passing through unfrequented and deserted streets, all rendezvoused in the alley in rear of the First National Bank. They quickly tied their horses, and without losing a moment's time, proceeded to make the attack upon the bank.

Robert Dalton, the notorious leader of the gang, and Emmet, his brother, went to the First National Bank. The other four, under the leadership of Grat Dalton, went to the private bank of C. M. Congdon & Co. In the meantime the alarm had been given. The Dalton boys were born and bred in this county and were well known to nearly every man, woman and child in town. In their progress through the town they had been recognized. City Marshal Connelly was quickly notified of their arrival, and almost before the bandits had entered the bank he was collecting a posse to capture them alive if possible, to kill them if necessary. He ran first to the livery stable of John J. Kloehr, a dead shot with a Winchester and a valuable man in any

fight. Then he summoned George Cubine, a merchant; Charles Brown, a shoemaker; John Cox, express agent, and other citizens who could be conveniently reached. Stationing them about the square which both of the banks faced, he hastened to strengthen his posse.

While the Marshal was collecting his forces the bandits in fatal ignorance of the trap that was being laid for them, were proceeding deliberately and coolly with their work of robbing the banks. Grat Dalton's band had entered Congdon's bank, and with their Winchesters leveled at Cashier Ball and Teller Carpenter had ordered them to throw up their hands. Grat Dalton searched them for weapons, while the other three desperadoes kept them covered with their rifles. Finding them to be unarmed Cashier Ball was ordered to open the safe. The cashier explained that the safe's door was controlled by a time lock, and that it could not by any means short of dynamite be opened before the time was up, which would be 10 o'clock, or in about twenty minutes.

"We'll wait," said the leader, and sat down at the cashier's desk.

"How about the money drawer?" he asked suddenly, and jumping up he walked around to the cages of paying and receiving tellers. He took the money, amounting to less than \$300, dumped it into a flour sack with which he was supplied, and again sat down while the time lock slowly ticked off the

seconds and the hands of the clock moved toward the hour of ten.

Bob and Emmet Dalton, in the meanwhile, were having better luck at the First National Bank. When they entered the bank they found within Cashier Ayers, his son Albert, and Teller W. H. Shepherd. Not one of them was armed, and with leveled revolvers the bandit brothers easily intimidated them. Albert Ayers and Teller Shepherd were kept still under the muzzles of Emmet Dalton's revolvers, while Bob Dalton forced Cashier Ayers to strip the safe vault and cash drawers of all the money contained in them and place it in a sack which the outlaws had brought. Fearing to leave the bank men behind lest they should give the alarm before the bandits should be able to mount their horses and escape, the desperadoes marched them out of the door with the intention of keeping them under guard until they made their escape.

The robbers and their prisoners made their appearance at the door of the bank just as Liveryman Kloehr and his companions of the marshal's posse took their position in the square. When the Dalton brothers saw the armed men in the square they left their prisoners on the steps of the bank building and ran for their horses. As soon as they reached the sidewalk Kloehr's rifle came to position like a flash. An instant later there was a cracking report, and Bob Dalton, the notorious leader of a notorious gang, fell in his tracks, dead. There was

not a quiver of a muscle after he fell. The bullet struck him in the right temple, plowed through his brain and passed out just above the left eye.

Emmet Dalton had the start of his brother, and before Kloehr could draw a bead on him he had dodged behind a corner of the bank and was making time in the direction of the alley where the bandits had tied their horses.

The shot which dropped Bob Dalton aroused Grat Dalton's band in Congdon's bank, who were patiently waiting for the time lock of the safe to be sprung with the hour of 10. Running to the windows of the bank they saw their leader prostrate on the ground. Revenge was their first thought, and they fired one volley out of the windows. Two men dropped, one to rise no more. Cashier Ayers fell on the steps of his bank, wounded in the groin. Shoemaker Brown, of the attacking party in the square, was shot through the body. He was removed to his shop, but died just as he was carried in.

The firing attracted the attention of Marshal Connelly, who was collecting more men for his posse. With the few which he had gathered he ran to the scene of the conflict.

After firing their volleys from the windows of the bank, the bandits attempted to escape, firing as they fled. The marshal's posse in the square, without organization of any kind, fired at the fleeing robbers, each man for himself. Kloehr's Winchester spoke twice more before the other members of

the posse could take aim, and two more of the bandits fell dead, both shot through the head, making three dead bandits to his credit. In the general fusilade which followed, Marshal Connelly, George Cubine and L. M. Baldwin, one of the Congdon bank clerks who was out collecting, were mortally hit and died on the field.

Dick Broadwell succeeded in escaping to the alley where the horses were tied, and mounting the swiftest horse of the lot, fled south in the direction of Indian Territory.

Emmet Dalton, who had escaped from the First National Bank, had already reached the alley in safety, but he had some trouble in getting mounted, and Dick Broadwell had already made his escape before Emmet got fairly started. Several of the posse were already mounted and pursued the bandits. Emmet Dalton's horse was no match for the fresher animals of his pursuers. As they closed on him he turned suddenly in his saddle and fired. The posse answered with a volley and Emmet toppled from his horse, hard hit. He was brought back to town dangerously wounded, and was supposed to be dying. He confessed to various crimes committed by the gang.

The feeling against the robbers became so intense that the citizens wanted to lynch the supposed dying outlaw who was lying in the hotel. To prevent this the coroner gave out the statement that Emmet was dead. The excitement then subsided.

Dick Broadwell had about ten minutes' start on his pursuers, but death overtook him in his flight. His dead body was found on the roadside, about a mile from the scene of the tragedy, having met his death at the hands of a young son of Mr. G. W. Russell, whose revolver brought the bandit down as he was dashing past his father's premises.

The money which the bandits had secured from the banks was found in the sacks, where it had been placed by the robbers. One sack was found under the body of Bob Dalton, who had fallen upon it. The other was found tightly clenched in Gratt Dalton's hand. The bodies of the outlaws were allowed to remain where they had fallen until the arrival of the coroner from Independence, who ordered them removed to the courthouse, where he held an inquest. While the bodies remained in the square they were viewed by hundreds of people from Coffeyville and other towns who came to inspect the battle ground.

The fulfillment of the prophesy that the Daltons would "die with their boots on" was universally commented on, also the peculiar fate which had decreed they should be shot down by former friends near the place of their birth.

The next day after the tragedy Emmet was visited by his aged mother, his sister, Mrs. Whipple, and his brother, Ben, against whom no criminal act was ever charged, and who, so far as known, is an upright and honorable man.

The meeting between the young bandit and his

sorrow-stricken mother was touching indeed. Surrounded by his sympathizing kindred, and under the kindly nursing received at the Farmers' Home, where he had been taken the day after the robbery, the wounded outlaw soon rallied and the physicians gave hope of his recovery.

To Officer Ransom Payne, who visited him at the Home, Emmet Dalton made the following confession :

"On the first of October, 1892, I met the boys south of Tulsa, and they asked me how much money I had. I told them about twenty dollars. I asked them how much they had, and they said about nine hundred dollars. I asked them what they were going to do, and they said this town, Coffeyville, had been talking about them, and some of the people had been trying to get them captured. I told them I knew it was a lie, that they used to have lots of friends here.

"Bob said he could discount the James boys' work and go up and rob both banks of Coffeyville in one day.

"I told him I did not want any of it at all. He said I had better go along and help get some money and leave the country; that if I stayed around here I was sure to get caught or killed.

"On the morning of the 3d of October we saddled up north of Tulsa, in the Osage nation, and rode about twenty miles toward Coffeyville, and we talked it over that day. I tried to prevail on the boys not to come up, for the people here had done

us no harm. They said all right, if I didn't want to come that the four would come and give the town a round-up. I told them if that was the case I might as well come with them. I came for the love of my brothers, and I knew that I would be chased just as hard if I didn't come as I would be if I did, and I had no money to get out of the country on.

"We camped in the timbered hills on the head of Hickory Creek, about twelve miles from Coffeyville, on the night of the 4th, and in the night we saddled up and rode to the Davis farm in the Onion Creek bottoms, and that morning (the 5th) we fed our horses some corn. I asked them if they were still coming up here. They said they were. I told them it would not be treating the people right, as they had always befriended us.

"I asked them how they were going to do it. Bob said that we would ride in about half-past nine o'clock in the morning, saying that there would not be so many people in town to hold up, and he wouldn't have to hurt anyone.

"He told me he would like to have me go with him, because I was quick on foot, and that he and I would go to the First National Bank, and let the others go to C. M. Congdon's. He said he would ride in and hitch at the old C. M. Congdon building. He said he would hitch there so that people would not see us until we got right into the banks.

"When we got to the lumber yard we saw that

the street was all torn up, and he said: 'Let us ride down in the alley and hitch.'

"All the five horses belonged to Bob. He bought one on the 2d, and others next morning. I am a first cousin of Bob and Cole Younger. My mother is a sister of Cole Younger's father."

It were bootless to continue this narrative further. The principal actors in this terrible tragedy are dead and buried, and what good purpose would it serve to detail here the ghastly particulars of the sickening scene presented by the battered and bleeding bodies of the dead bandits as they lay piled like cord-wood in the city jail, or side by side in front of the barn, "posing" for their photographs?

Marshal Connelly and his little band of citizen heroes, who so bravely met and baffled the bandits, have won for themselves the everlasting gratitude of the law-abiding people, not only of Coffeyville, but of the entire country.

John Kloehr, the liveryman, whose ready aim sent three of the bandits to their death, has been rewarded with a special recognition of his courage and skill by the bankers and other citizens of Chicago, in the shape of a magnificent gold badge. On a semi-circular gold bar, from which the badge proper is pendant, is the name John Joseph Kloehr. On a gold ribbon, just beneath this plate, are the words: The Emergency Arose, The Man Appeared. The badge proper is a gold disc two and a quarter inches in diameter, embellished with handsome scroll-work, raised bands and laurel wreath surrounding

a star, in the center of which is a large diamond.

On the reverse are the words: "Presented by friends in Chicago, who admire nerve and courage when displayed in defense of social order." The badge complete is four inches in length and cost \$350.



CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS RIDER.

On a fall afternoon, a man was riding alone. It was not the part of the Neutral Strip where most men would like to be without a trusty riding companion, and "the more the merrier."

Right here, on the Red Fork, rumor had it that it was unhealthy for peddlers, Johnny-come-latelys and anybody foolish enough to carry cash into the wilderness.

Those gentlemen of leisure—when they do loaf, are of infernal activity when they spring into the saddle and ply quirt and rowel—they ruled this region. And most dreaded of all were the two Dalton brothers. More dreaded than the red savage, or of all the rascals who used to run down south, when the Blue Mountains of Utah became too hot to hold them.

This man, however, broad-shouldered and muscular, but with no spare flesh on his well-knit frame, seemed a tough morsel for a bandit to "take hold and chaw on."

He was perhaps only medium size but, to a Mexican and the Indians of this section, he looked tall from the military style in which he held himself, though deeply fatigued, in the Mexican saddle,

with large stirrups of wood and leather which hid his small and shapely feet from sight. He wore a buckskin coat, greasy with his having dressed down pelts and hides in it, and this had hardened so that it would have resisted the ordinary pistol carrying 32's, even though the more popular firearm among those whose motto is, "Take what you see and rustle for more," the 45, would have ripped it some.

His pants, however, did not belong to the same suit; they were a pair of that common gray duck stuff from the Eastern ready-made warehouses, but worn so thin that he would have scratched his skin if he had tried to light a match on them.

His eyes, tired though he was, peered indefatigably from under a monstrous slouch hat, only a little larger than the sunflower spurs irritating his dogged little cayuse. It jogged on, type of the brutes who can do sixty miles a day, while living on the air.

Like master, like steed—this beast had a knowing, fearless, wary air; the rider had lived, you could see, for a period in constant vigils.

He had pressed on, like one on a mission which nothing must divert, over sand, ridges of the trash brought by the summer overflows, and through tufty grass of extraordinary height.

Suddenly he stopped and scrutinized the horizon to the northwest.

"This time" he said, in a low voice, as if he feared even the grass hoppers might hear him, "I b'lieve I have got 'em."

He meant the landmarks.

"That is the Lone Tree, sure and sartin; but what the deuce do they mean by the Big Face—which I could not mistake, 'want to know!"

He has just struck one of those long, level, broad valleys, which will be studded with happy towns and villages before a great while, lonely enough now and covered with the creeper more common in Arkansas, a vine with a fan-like leaf, and a five-rayed crimson bloom with a centre dot of blue. It was crowding out the peavine with its purple blossom.

A little cane lay green in the lowlands, but all else was thus lowly carpeted, save where one tree of immense size suddenly loomed up and served as a landmark.

Thus re-assured, the horseman encouraged his horse and crossed the plain towards the tree.

But he moved with great caution on this open expanse.

"By Jo," said he, glancing mechanically over his person and weapons to be sure he was "all there;" "I fancy I see a mounted man scurrying along the ridge. I wonder now if it is my brother running to keep the appointment, or only one of his boys?"

Although he had no idea that other than a friend was speeding to the same rendezvous, it was not surprising if by a coincidence some one else had chosen the same mark on the same afternoon.

But he reached the ridge without seeing more of this mysterious rider.

The tree was farther than he had anticipated, it was so large that he had taken it to be on the crest. But it was on a sandy plain, rolling slightly and only diversified by sand buttes which altered the place in severe winds.

The tree was a giant red cedar, by some freak of nature spared from fires, storms, and the great earthquake which is supposed to have broken the lowermost branch and spoilt its otherwise fine symmetry.

"Hello!" said the man to himself; "now I know what the Bad Face meant!"

Indeed, black earth prairie streaked with white sand, and some reddish buttes, perhaps betokening metal, cropped up here and there with a "regular irregularity." It did not require more than the Indians childish imagination to see in the markings—from the height whence the newcomer was descending—a resemblance to a human face, full, but on a colossal scale.

Involuntarily, one looked up to see that it was not the reproduction of a visage in the blue dome—such a head as the poets give to the Spirit of Storms off the Cape.

It was calculated to awe the red man, but this heathen, after a slight tribute by his silence and admiration, proceeded, merely whistling, "Dancing in the Barn."

Meanwhile, without his understanding how one

had dared to ride so swiftly on a part where the ground was unsafe from badger-earths, the horseman previously spied had come down from the summit and was crossing the sandy waste ahead of him, to his left, bent doggedly on reaching the tree.

"Go it," muttered he; "you have a good nag there, half-American bred, I reckon. I almost think I know it, too. It has not got weights on its heels! It is not Frank—no, a slighter built man, and he certainly wants to shun company."

In fact, the fleeter stranger, without appearing to notice another was on the desert, continued to push on, the horse bounding as if mad with pain, though the rider was not seen to use either whip or spur, and reached the tree base. There a slight pause was made as though the cavalier was studying the bark for signs, but on it went once more.

When the man arrived, not a trace of it remained except the disturbance of the fine dust, a little less alkali-saturated at the tree.

He could not help reining in, for which his pony was grateful, to give a good look round.

Unless the other horse had been taught the trick of lying down in the grass, and the rider had done the same thing, they had vanished.

But that could be attended to later.

He had business at the tree, on the broad side of which, like the disappeared one, he tried to trace certain signs among those which might be but the scoring by bears' claws, only that they were made higher up than even the biggest cinnamon could

scratch. No doubt, men on horseback, even to standing in the saddle, had cut some.

Such a tablet or bulletin-board in the wilds is common, a practice inaugurated by the red rovers.

"Not a line," said the horseman, sorrowfully. "Frank must have got my word, and it is not any three men that would have held him back from welcoming his brother, snatched by the skin of his teeth from the law and her ministers in the Golden Land. Can he have busted his cinch? Can he have met one throw-down wuss than mine in his own haps and mishaps? It riles me tremendous to stand here, without a word of why."

Then, still seeing nothing, but calling the seen rider to mind, he collected his lung powers and emitted a sound so like the call of an eagle, as they scream to a mate when sitting on a lofty bough, that a real bird must have replied if one were by.

At the same moment, a similar call, not in so loud a voice, pealed forth near enough to make him jump, though his nerves were iron, and a light figure stood upright in a patch of grass growing greener than elsewhere, the shade of the tree forming an oasis in the waste.

He rode a few strides nearer and saw that the person had ridden, horse and rider, in an old buffalo wallow—what time there were buffalo!—so overgrown now with pigweed and grass that his not perceiving anything of them was excusable.

"A boy!" muttered he. "No, by thunder, a woman in buckskin!"

A woman it was, young and extremely handsome, with a fair complexion that defied the fierce sun and had not a shade of sunburn or a freckle. Her suit of deer-hide was nattily cut, but it bore traces of having been ridden in, and where thorns and bayonet palm and gritty rocks had tried to rip it; it was slack now with her having forded running water, too, which must have given her horse a swim for it.

As she approached, with her hands hanging, she smiled as if she recognized the other, who however stared in blank amaze, and she made a sign by crossing the two forefingers of both hands so as to present the "pig-pen brand" of the cattle stealer of this region—the one which transforms the "two-bar mark" into another.

At this the man smiled too, and cried:

"Well, here's news! are you one of the boys?"

"I represent Frank Dalton, yes, brother Bob!" was the amused answer.

"Who are you anyway to know me and have my name by the handle? I thought that I was remembered, as most of us are when we have been shoved into the calaboose and the shysters clean us out of all the dust."

"I am Julia Gault, all the way from where you were raised, up yonder."

"A Kansas sunflower, by the Lord! I just knew that I had seen you afore."

"Don't you remember licking the schoolmaster—the imposter who set up as so goody-good—"

"And who turned out bad afore I come away?"

"Last saw him in Marable, Kiowa, and the biggest drunkey on the State line—with a nose, a nose on him as red as the planet Mars! But this is not telling my story; I heard from your mother—"

Robert Dalton started and sighed.

"Where I was likely to find Frank—always my spark from as far back as I want to look. I expected to see you with him—"

"No, I have been in California, fighting the law for my life and liberty, and it took all of a considerable pile to buy me off. I arrived here poor as a New England farm on the hill-side."

He made a sign of apology for interrupting her, for he was full of courtesy to the woman who reminded him of boyish days when desperate deeds were not even dreamt of.

"Glad you are out of it, no such luck for everybody."

"Then you bring bad news."

"What think you of that?"

She whistled peculiarly, and up from the hollow where she had stowed herself started her horse and came towards her. The two animals, Bob Dalton having alighted and confidently turned his loose, approached and rubbed noses. The mount of the Amazon presented a horrid aspect. Slashes on the haunches had been rubbed with chili and all was inflamed with hard riding.

"Well, this looks as if you had been taking your steak raw on the range while going at full speed," said he.

"It is the Comanches' way of getting the utmost out of a horse. I tell you, Robert, that I was hard pressed. I left a lock of my hair cut by a bullet for my pursuers," she said, lightly, but her tone was on the whole as mournful as her eyes, and it took all "the man" in the woman not to give way to tears.

"Is Frank taken?" asked the man, gripping his rifle barrel hard and frowning so savagely that she almost shrank from the fiendish expression. "He is my younger brother—the weakling, the pet of the flock," he added apologetically for his affection.

"You would not think him a lamb if you had seen him in the first rush—shake off four men like a bull tosses coyotes; one fellow, a claim-jumper from Kingfisher, went up so high that you would think a windmill had h'isted him!"

"Tell me all from the send-off," said Dalton, squatting down at the roots of the tree.

"Frank was getting on fine when I saw him and I may say joined the band—"

"Joined the band, eh, Jule? I did not think that of Frank! He was tarred, but he might not have smeared a fleece like yours—as the preacher says, it was more than ever his duty to keep the first blossoms from the blast of sin."

"I persuaded him, Bob, they wanted up there to make me marry an old money-grubber from the East, and they made the home a hades on the prairie. I could not stand that! I went to Frank, I say, and I will do him justice to say that he treated me like a lady. He said: 'Run along home, sis! your mommer

will be wanting you to git the cows home! but I was firm. I said I could be useful—that it took but a mighty little wisp of straw to set great timber afire, and he weakened.”

“I hope for your folks’ sake and Frank’s honor—”

“That we married? You bet!” and her eyes, gentle enough, blazed with dignity. “Frank ain’t no slouch, and the first preacher-sharp that we could rope in coupled the span! Well, he settled me in a pretty place in Eagle Creek Valley, and we were so happy—for a while. Frank was doing well, keeping cool, committing no freaks of fun anywhere within cat-call of our home—when, three days ago, word came by a half-breed who is one of our intelligence agents, that a man whom he was sharpening a knife for was in the vicinity!”

“Elegant word that,” muttered Bob; “I have heard any amount of them while the lawyers were clawing me between them over my case.”

“This man was Dutch Pete, who kept a hotel on the old Lake City stage-road afore the railroad spoiled all, and he had, for a slight wager, just doughnut to a dollar, cheated Frank when he first came out.”

“Not at cards, for I never knew the boy as easy to fool with over the pasteboards.”

“No, the Dutchman was a smart cook for a camp or a hotel; he boasted he could pass horse off as prime beef, and what he did to Frank was to get him to eat a buzzard or some carrion bird, in a sauce that was tempting, for some game fit for a Christian.”

“And Frank let him run, at that,” cried Dalton, fiercely.

“Frank never knew, the sauce was so good, and the brandy to wash it down; but the galoot could not keep his hush! He just bragged about how he had the bulge on young Dalton as soon as the name was getting glorious along the border, and that naturally stirred up Frank.”

“I should have bounded in where the cocok was holding the family round at a Thanksgiving feed, and you would think the room was a morgue!”

“So,” resumed the girl, with knitted brow as she re-drew the scene, “when your brother was told that at last Pete was to be interviewed, he buckled on his belt and rode out that way. Well, he went rapping of his horns against everybody he met, but nobody saveys where this cook is feeding other shorthorns with buzzard and Frank begun to feel weary. At last an obliging book-peddler, peddling powder and cartridges to the Indians on the strict quiet, offers to lead him to a camp of Huns extending the railroad to Angeli’s, and he pushed on, cutting the work out for the guide to follow—for why? that camp was catered for by Dutch Pete.

“On the road he sent up the rallying cry, and he had four or five with him when he dashed into the camp.

“Well, that wa’n’t no camp of real Huns—the Dagoes were a posse of citizens, toughs after blood-money, rough-scuffs gathered by U. S. Marshal Dick the ‘Terror’ Salton of Red Rock, the marshal of some

border city, and a sheriff or two. They were painted up and rigged out to the nines, and they took in—nay, gobbled up the boys.”

“Who was along—not big Hank?”

“Yes, but unfortunately he was so drunk that his knife shook out of the sheath; he kicked and butted, but his fall end-up had come. He and that slim young man who came out to die of consumption away from his folks, they were shot in the scrimmage. Ohio Bill ran for cover, leading a horse, and Tennessee Bill no sooner was plugged and pulled off the horse than he fell to blubbering that if they would let up he would bring out his family in a schooner and disconnect with beer schooners which had led him to his ruin! The others were killed right off.”

“Men are but blazes, and soon are gone,” said Bob, sententiously. “So Frank was took?”

“He had no eyes but for Dutch Pete, but he had hardly pulled his gun onter him afore he was fairly climbed upon. I told you he shook himself free once but they grabbed him again to hold.

“Then they cheered over him, roped like a mustang broken.

“They said, ‘We’ll teach you whether our tillage is to be your pillage!’ and went on low-down in their taunting.

“I had a suspicion that thunder was in the air, for I just had to put on the pants and mount a horse and ride on the track Frank had made. I met one of the runaways, and heard they had gone up the flume! I was afraid they would hold me or make me look on

while they made a pendulum of poor Frank on a tree, for Ohio told me that they intended blood, but I circled round and saw that they had caged Frank."

"Cage nothing out there in the wilderness."

"I mean what I say, Bob—but look there!"

Her slender hand pointed.

On the edge of the level, at a great distance, so that only an Indian could tell a fluttering blanket from a flapping wing, something glittered in stripes of a set form; ludicrous as the simile is, it made one think of the large silver gridiron in restaurants on which the dainty epicures want their chops grilled.

"What in the nation is that?" cried Bob Dalton, shading his eyes. "This lays over me."

"Why, it is the cage in which they have shut up poor Frank," rejoined the young woman.

"A cage? Faugh! it is degradation, and I never heard of such a thing to a road-agent."

"It is a cage, boy—horse-high, bull-strong and hog-tight, which a passal of tenderfoot lion-hunters brought out on the cars to put the pumas in, or the grizzilies, but the first critter that leapt on them in the night stampeded the whole outfit, and the steel cage was left rusting—if anything rusts in this lovely air.

"The chief motor in the squad that took Frank was not Dutch Pete, nor yet the marshals, nor the sheriffs, neither—it was Mo. Marbuckle."

"What, him that was sweet on you when Frank was courting, and you in short frocks?"

"That's him. The school-teacher. He is a lawyer now—"

"Do I hate poison? then, I hate him!" said Bob, in disgust, as he blinded a lizard with a spit.

"Same feeling here," added Julia, clapping her hand on her heart, aching again sharply since she recognized the portable prison-house of her husband. "He never liked Frank or Frank him since they came to blows about me and fell into the pond, grappled. I hear that the old hunks that they wanted me to marry had furnished him with a complete outfit to hunt him down. He boasted that he had supplied the police of 'Frisco with the information that led to your being laid up in lavender!"

"Oh, it was him, was it! I notched his brand on my rifle stock," said Bob, grimly, with his eyes fixed on the glittering object.

The figures in the little caravan began to be discernible to his experienced eyes which the prison white-wash had not impaired.

Over the plain, thanks to the transparent air, they could hear cries which they interpreted as the well-known "catch-up!" of a train of man-hunters, who knew that they must not fiddle with time on the march with such a prisoner as a leader of banditti.

"I suppose," said Bob, calmly, "they are coming on, about three miles an hour. They won't be here till an hour before sun. We can do something, can we not, to give Frank a chance to die with his gun in hand, say, Jule?"

"If he was not hurt bad, yes, for certain."

Bob Dalton scanned the ground near by.

"They will be hunting water, and here is some," he

said, indicating a paltry flow by the buffalo wallow, where a prairie-dog had made a well with his unerring instinct. "Is it any good decoying them here?"

"Why yes, if you can put on the paint so that they will not know you. Marbuckle alone could penetrate the disguise of you and me."

"Disguise?"

"Yes, I have an idea."

She whispered something as if afraid of her own voice and it made the hearer laugh as the red man does when atrocious villainy is suggested.

"But they would not believe that we were keeping hotel out here," he remonstrated, shaking his head.

"They would if they saw the hotel."

"Ho-tel? Where are you going to scare up a hotel round here in an hour?"

"I do not mind telling you. But it is telling."

She took a long look at the party in the far-off, among whom ever glittered the metal bars, and said:

"Time enough."

Catching her brother-in-law by the arm, she led him around the tree and in a patch of grass showed him the remains of one of those portable houses which had served land-grabbers to swear to the tenantable residence on the homestead clearing and so defraud the government out of millions of acres. This one had moved after a bullock or mule team all the way from some point on the railroad, from Joplin, since the '60's. The dry air had preserved it and the wood-bug had turned up its nose at its eastern lumber.

After its vacation, its mission fulfilled to enrich villains, some squatter had lived in it.

On the ground, scattered as the wolves had turned them over, were broken bones, white as pearl. Of human or animal, a glance hardly told.

"Indians killed a family," said Julia.

"I see. Here is the house, I allow. But it will be a job, to a man and a gal, knocked over by hard riding, to put that shanty together."

"No; easier than you reckon, Bob. We shall have it up, roof of brush on, and a fire burning, with a roast of ground-hog to scent the plain, in an hour. Then we can raise a smoke or a yell of 'house, ho!' that will fetch them kiting for the night. The rest concerns ourselves."

"We will risk it. Two to twelve is long odds."

While they were setting up the house, perplexed by the numbered boards having warped, the train of horsemen around the cage skirted the plain as if fearful of venturing where no prospect of water was presented.

The Lone Tree seemed to be a standing mockery on the absence of vegetation.

Forced to come easterly to make the tour of a jungle of short but spiky grass, the party were more plainly in sight. In the midst was quite clear the strange thing for this region—a steel-barred cage, capable of resisting a bear's claws and teeth, through the interstices of which could be perceived what would have been deemed a brute beast but for Julia's assuring Dalton that it was a man.

His clothes rent, his face battered and his hands clotted with dried blood, he seemed one of those fancied horrors of old ages, the man who could turn into a wolf and was midway between the two beings.

Prostrate or rather crouching, beaten but not hopeless, ashamed at being cooped up as if for show at the county fair, Frank Dalton, the handsome Frank of the fandangoes, was scarcely recognizable. But in his dark eyes gleamed an imperishable light.

If sadness was also in them, quenching some of the brightness, that was because he could not help thinking of the two whom he loved most in creation—his wife and his brother.

But he thought that one was slumbering calmly in her home, never dreaming of his fix, and the other imprisoned in the Golden State.

How could he think that both were at hand and working a scheme for his deliverance!

CHAPTER III.

LARGER REWARDS.

The captors of Frank Dalton were pretty well "played."

The fight to clear off his few upholders and master him did not count for so much, but they had been trailing for him a great while.

They had not been in much hurry to take him, not from fear, but because the blood-money was piling on, and there was a rumor in the last town that an express company was clapping a cool five thousand on his head.

The chiefs were officers of justice who had their professional reputation at stake, but the rank and file were another breed.

They were just those scourers of the border who mentally and bodily wanted some scouring themselves. They might have done a little rustling in their day, when it was safer, but they were loping along, looking for easy jobs, when Dutch Pete, who had located Frank Dalton's wife and believed he would be found now and then in her neighborhood, suggested how to entangle him. They did not like the look of it till they fell in with the camp of the marshals, two or three parties which had consorted for strength's sake since they heard that Frank had pretty nigh all the section on

his side, through interest, terror or business reasons.

Then the whole assembly, with Dutch Pete to be the instigator and Marbuckle the ingenious planner, laid out to have Frank by the ankle.

We have been told how he was decoyed by revenge to fall into the trap. They were a bit appalled by his ferocious resistance and indomitable spirit. Time and again he had got away mysteriously when set on a horse, alone or behind another, with his legs tied under the belly, and nobody liked to ride double with one who "looks like a meat-saw sharpened to cut ears off."

The suggestion of the steel cage, abandoned by the menagerie men, was hailed as a windfall and all clapped Marbuckle on the back for saying it.

Needless to add that, with his jealousy and hatred of Frank for having beguiled the fair Julia to run off to him, he rejoiced—gloated on the young man grated in like a "critter."

None of them felt easy, though, while in this desert where the rovers might be rallying to rescue their beloved leader.

So they pushed on across the edge of the intolerable plain.

But though they could finish their flasks and buckle in, it was not so with their horses and the mules tackled to the wheeled truck bearing the cage.

"I say, done up!" said a heavy rider, the local marshal, Lex (Lexington) Smithers, reining in, and none too soon, as he was almost shot by his horse into an

earth-crack, caused by drouth, but ascribed by the tenderfoot to earthquakes!

"I concur," said his left-hand bridle companion, imitating him; "but we can not camp down here!"

This was Dick Salton, a very stout man, who came from Louisville away back to reduce his corpulency but without the change from beer to whisky altering his figure.

"I should say not," added the sheriff of Pluribus county; "right afore is a chaparral of pison oak."

"The smell makes me sick," said Marbuckle, a fine young man, riding upright like a cavalryman and in his rough suit not suggesting a lawyer. "Let's turn back and hunt for a drink under that big tree. I should thin, Mr. Salton, that there must be water there to keep its enormous top green in all summer."

"That is not it," said the marshal; "but it has struck its roots in some sunken river. Jerush, how lonesome it is! I could wish that it were a boomers' town so we could fill up with whisky."

"Or even a cattle-range—the camp of cowboys would surely be jolly!"

"And as like as not they would shoot at our prisoner just to see if they could pop him atween the bars—"

"Or at us, Salton, for caging a man! mighty peculiar idees the boys have of how to treat men, even ruffians like that caught red-handed."

"Hold on! what is that light I see?" asked the marshal.

"Beyond the tree? I see it plain! that is a signal by which those robbers indicate our line of march and

gather their chums to waylay us," said Dutch Pete, a Frenchman who was not a hero out of his caboose.

"No," said Sheriff Vandeleer, a compact man with a record of three in the Panhandle and two on the Arenses Pass Railroad; in that case there would be a line of them running the way we scooted. I know all about the bandits' fire-pointers—I chased Russian Bill three hundred mile by them."

"It may be a camp of explorers or emigrants—some of those niggers who ain't satisfied with the beautiful country and want all Eden in a grapevine fence."

The chiefs gathered round the captain.

All stared at the fire which burned steadily as a clear conscience and defined the vast trunk of the monster tree and, what was stranger, a small house dwarfed by its towering stem.

"A house!" said Marbuckle.

"Sapristi! they are cooking!" added Pete, professionally; "how my mouth wets itself with water!"

"Perhaps they are cooking crow for your supper, as you did for him yonder!" and the speaker jerked his thumb towards the unfortunate in the cage, who was lying down during the rest, but had not closed his fiery eyes.

"This part offers nothing but a dry camp," said Salton, rubbing the alkali dust, clotted in little balls, from his reddened eyes; we must recruit or we shall not get out of this wilderness tomorrow. I say, go on to that fire."

No one objected, and as though this little stoppage

had refreshed all hands, the party turned to the right and boldly advanced over the arid plain. The horses sank to the fetlock in the powdery dust, but there was no breeze yet off the mountains and it was too heavy to rise and choke.

The cage-wagon went softly without jolting, though the slight burden was toilsome to the tired draggers.

As they approached the point, they could see that it was really a house—not a cabin such as they might expect to see, made of fallen boughs of the Lone Tree, whose limbs no man had climbed to lop, or a bark shanty such as hunters sometimes run up—but a regular frame, such as innumerable used to strew the west country before the railroad came along.

“A miner!” said one.

“A settler who wants elbow room,” said another.

All had their guess, except Marbuckle, who, lawyer-like, was on his guard against this burlesque copy of Aladdin’s mushroom palace sprung up in a night where no living soul except the banditti were supposed to roam.

“It will suffice for the rest,” said the marshal at last, having reconnoitered the surroundings with a night-glass, as he felt all the responsibility of conducting the already celebrated outlaw to a place for trial.

As they drew nearer, and the fire, built before the frame house, glowed plainly under a large iron pot, sending from under its dancing lid a savory steam, they felt any doubts subside started by the apprehension such wildernesses always inspire towards all strangers.

Nothing more pastoral and harmless while inviting to hungry, footsore, and thirsty travelers could be seen.

The house was small, certainly, but they did not want to go inside it. They were used to open air, with the only bed-spread the blue heaven spangled with stars.

In the firelight, on a stool by the door, sat an old, old man, with white hair, while a tonsure like priests have, on the top, the parchment-like skin glistening, hinted that he had been scalped at one time remotely. His complexion was yellow and he had the well-known appearance of those Mexicans, of all breeds, whose age is lost in antiquity and pass for a hundred as easily as seventy, slaves attached to the pasturage.

“By Jo,” said the sheriff; “that is one of those old humbugs brought forward whenever an American disputes a land-claim to prove that in 1842 the Mexicans had settled the estate since the old fossil’s father’s time.”

The aged Greaser, smiling to show his deficient teeth, stopped in his pastime of carving his long crook with a penknife, and removed an old wool hat in courtesy to the gentlemen.

He had very bright eyes to be of so great an age, but his hands trembled so that you feared that he would cut himself in whittling.

At the noise of the wheels in the dust and the hoofs, an elderly woman came out of the house. She was also old but might be the man’s daughter rather than his wife. She did not display the curiosity of her sex but gazed at them with a stolid expression. Then she flew

into a rage and screaming "Los Indios—Los Indios bravos!" dived into the house, terrified.

She could be heard within, cowering under the scanty furniture, if there were any, gibbering and muttering in terror and futile spite.

"Peace, my dear little angel," said the old man, in Mexican Spanish.

There was no doubt, it was one bound to him by ties of affection, for his voice was tender.

"These are not Indians, not wild Indians, my child—"

Oh, it was his daughter, then?

"They are—"

He hesitated and well he might.

Through roaming over hogback and ridge, down the gorge and up the earth-crack's ragged side, the party looked almost as shaggy and terrible as the young bandit in the cage. Dismounted, they lost all the bearing which a cavalier preserves, and their footgear, chafed by the box-stirrups, was pitiable.

Smothered in alkali dust, streaming with perspiration, their thin faces swarthy with the sun-brown, almost excused the frightened female for calling them red men.

"They are caballeros," said the Mexican, politely.

"Good evening, senor," said the marshal, glad to air his Spanish while he stretched his legs by walking up to the inoffensive patriarch. "We are officials of the country, who are out on duty."

"Happy to welcome you, captain, to our humble home in the wilds," said the Mexican, bowing to all.

"Bunch the horses," said the commander, making himself at home.

"I have found water," said the sheriff; "look! it is a prairie-dog well, and I dasay in the picture-books them railroads distribute in the East, this would be figgered out as a cascade with a tremendous gush of fifty feet—"

"Whereas," interrupted Marbuckle, "the only gush is what the ink-slingers give it."

There was a pause while the men unsaddled and eased the horses, which were given to drink at the wallow.

The ones not posted as lookouts, and two going to scout as soon as they had refreshed with a drink, came up to the house, which they examined with curiosity—not that they had not seen the like before, but that a Mexican should be in it.

"So you have located here?" began the United States marshal, sitting on a root of the tree, which came up out of the ground for nourishment like a serpent. He refused the stool, which would not have borne his weight, constructed as it was of a slice of wood and mounted on three legs.

"I found the location," said the old man, mumbling and smirking to be amiable; "settlers here before—brought this house in a wagon—Indians come and clean them out! me no like Indians—see! they raise my hair when I was a boy—me Texas man—me seen Gen. Austin, me seen Gen. Houston—"

"You were not one of the butchers of the Alamo, eh, old father?" said Marbuckle, joking.

"No, me good 'Merican Mexican! me marry a 'Merican lady!"

"Oh, you did? Hum," said Smithers. "Was that the lady we saw cut away from bashfulness—poor little daisy!"

"No, sir; that is my daughter. My wife die way back in 'fifty—the year the caravans of gold diggers streaked across the plains."

"Don't press him—he will make out he landed with Chris, himself! Say, is that good to eat, what you have in the sasspan?"

"Wild goat, yes, me cook for the week—"

"That will about do us, then—good!" said the marshal, who was "a hard keeper," as they say of some tame cattle. "But don't be afraid—we are cavaleroes, real, genuine gents; we shall pay straight goods!"

"Then you are not like these ladrones, these thieves and cut-throats, the salteadores?"

"Oh, the Dalton gang?"

"Ay, the Daltones! si, si, senyor," cried the old man, with admiration, so loud that the woman re-appeared, peeping out of the door.

"Here's the witch," said a voice.

And all laughed. She had gone to touch herself up at the toilet, of course, as all women are coquets, even out here. But her dirty, greasy face, the harsh hair trailing down along her dark cheek, and her fingernails in mourning, made her almost as repulsive as an Indian squaw.

"Please do not make fun of my afflicted child, gen-

tllemen," plaintively pleaded the Mexican. "She is not in her right mind since we had to fly from our house south, where Geronimo was out with his braves. Everybody in northern Texas knows what we went through as his captives—me, Mario, the Ancient, and his daughter Maria."

"I think I have heard of the old boy before," said one of the party, who knew nothing about it but was one of those who want to pretend to universal knowledge.

This worthless confirmation would have been invaluable had the newcomers the slightest suspicion that the aged Mexican was Bob Dalton masquerading or that his afflicted daughter was Julia in a disguise as good.

What the party wanted was their supper, and they could pitch into that with the greatest complacency, as the scouts returning reported that the country would be safe for a nunnery to take its evening stroll abroad.

The men were sprawling on the ground, wrapped in their serapes, or sitting up against the tree.

"Well," said the leader, "if you do not worship the Daltons, then you ought to burn a candle to us, for we are the sworn foes of such black cattle. We are out on the track of the last of that trick, for the other Dalton is locked up in California, where they know enough to keep a good thing when they grab him—he will be swung, see?"

"Oh, they have hung him, Roberto Dalton, in California?" said the old man, holding his hand to his ear as if not sure he had heard aright.

"That is a fact! just as sure as that his brother Frank is on the last plank to suffer the like fate."

"What, have you locked up the young man, too?"

"He is locked in, anyway. We have him."

"You have him, colonel?" and the man's eyes opened, as it were, in as much astonishment as admiration.

"Right here," and he pointed jauntily to the cage.

"Daltone the brigand! Daltone the horse-stealer! Daltone the highwayman!" cried the old man, making the sign of the cross as though he were citing Old Nick himself. "Well, if that is him," and he tottered towards the cage, "you have not got a beauty."

The sentry who was by the cage, as a superfluous precaution, kindly drew up to one side.

"Oh, will you let my daughter see him, too?"

Marshal Smithers nodded and, still more, condescended to take a brand from the fire to light the lady to the spot.

This gallant action earned the portly officer a round of applause—the Indian "Hi-yi" several times repeated.

"My poor girl takes every sight as it comes," said Mario; "but this may rouse her sluggish mind. Come, Maria, the soldiers will do you no harm, come out and see the robber of the mountains close to!"

At this appeal, the woman seemed to be enticed.

She came out altogether from the house, and ran to her father, keeping by his side. The light from the torch must have hurt her eyes, for she blinked and avoided it.

Up to this moment the prisoner had maintained his



quelled but defiant air. At the utterance of his name, with a Spanish flourish by the Mexican, he shuddered and his eyes changed in expression.

"He is indignant at being made a show of," remarked the marshal, "when he ought to be proud. Your old purblind eyes will be nothing to those bent on him when we get him to Kiowa."

"Oh, will many people be in Iowa to see him?"

"You bet! but not Iowa, you ignorant old lunk! Iowa is a State by itself, bigger than half Mexico, while Kiowa is a town. But you Mexics ain't half fit for citizenship, you don't try to learn anything of this great country."

"Great country, yes," said the disguised robber, in his broken voice; "great with heroes of the roads—but they who take them prisoners must be so much the greater!"

And he made a motion as though he would kiss the hand of the deliverers of the Southwest of her sharpest scourge.

"Is this the robber chief, father!" questioned the woman, in scarcely intelligible lingo. "Me not tink him more than a man in distress—he must be brave, too, that they have to keep him in a wicked iron cage like the lion at a festa!"

Some of the bystanders frowned.

"Don't you mind her, gentlemen," the man hastened to say. "Half the time she does not know what she say and the other half it is not worth listening to. So this is Frank Dalton?" continued he, approaching the

cage, but with the shrinking of a countryman by that of a wild beast.

This time the bandit held up his head and looked at him and Julia with a pretendedly offended expression.

"Yes, how would you like to be shut up with him for half an hour?" said the marshal.

The old man crossed himself many times and ran through the list of saints, in horror that might have struck the beholders as almost too great to be real.

"Well, then, look sharp and let us have supper. Or we will shut you and the woman in with our live guyuscutus while we hustle for ourselves."

"Maria" screamed and ran to the fire, while "Mario" said:

"You are right, captain. What has a poor lone settler like me to do with a knight of the road like that? It is not likely that he would ever seek my roof for harbor or sit at my board; nothing for his crew to pillage here, I, who have no herd or flock, and not a dollar; woe to me, and heaven help all in distress!"

With a feeble step he joined the woman at the fire, which the compulsory guests replenished with fuel, and though his assistance was poor, he lent it to hurry up the feast.

All his store went to the picnic, however, with the utmost good will; peanuts, wild potatoes, corn, the meat in the pot which he said was goat venison—the last of a haunch which some Indians had driven into the valley but left without cutting it up. Coyotes had finishes the rest to the bones, which he offered to point out.

The smell was enough for the famished ones, who swore that the woman was an accomplished cook and the old man the king of hosts.

Dutch Pete deigned to taste the stew and could not suggest any improvement but a dash of gunpowder, as the kitchen in the open air was deficient in salt.

Dishes and platters were absent or had to be improvised of wood and bark, but they were guests accustomed to bring their own table outfit and they brought a grand appetite, too.

Soon all the jaws were going, and though the meat was as tough as though fresh killed, the justice done was as ample as that which they hoped for Frank Dalton.

Livened up by the prevailing jollity, the old boy produced his greatest treasure, an Indian jug of traders' whisky, which required some coaxing to entice forth. Think of it, they were a hundred miles from a cask!

Then the gaiety was immense; the old man went to and fro smiling, while his daughter sang a Spanish song about black eyes, stars, flowers and music, with a reminiscence of her far-off girlish days which redoubled the laughter.

Even the prisoner, joy is so contagious, relaxed his puzzled and moose look, and croaked in a hoarse voice that he wanted a drink.

"Where is Hebe for the captive Mercury," said Marbuckle, a little tipsy; "here, thou beautiful seraph, take him my horn and tell him to drink to your eyes! Faith,

I bet you were a beauty in your hey-dey—fifty years ago.”

“Me fraid go near monster!” replied Julia, shrinking.

“Any one can see you are a Mexican! why, when that rogue is in the cooler in town, you will see that the finest ladies flock to carry him bouquets and give him peaches and cream. Go to him, he will not hurt you! I do not believe he will even try to snatch a kiss, though he was a divil among the ladies!”

A roar of laughter hailed this slap at the woman’s wrinkled face.

She took the glass and went timidly to the cage.

The sentry had stepped over to a comrade, who had a horn which they were emptying between them.

“Good God! is this you?” whispered Frank as their hands met between the bars.

“It is, and that is your brother.”

“Bless you both!”

“We have the train laid to have you free right off.”

They could not say any more. Frank only pretended to drink, for it was the horn of his deadliest enemy. But he lifted up his voice, saying:

“True friends! may we never know the want of them!”

And he shivered the horn by throwing it out as if it should never liquidate a blamable toast.

“You are done out of your glass, Moses,” said Salton to the lawyer. . “You will have to parch, unless you coax the lady to share with you—only, let her shave first!”

"So she shall drink with us," said Marbuckle.

"Do not ask her, gentlemen," said the old Mexican; "it is too great an honor for an idiot."

"Pshaw! with that whisky we are all made mad together. What the deuce do they put in that rot, anyhow? I feel like an Injin who has run his sluice up to the high mark with kerosene!" and the strong-headed U. S. Marshal put his hand to his forehead. "Here, Belladonna, take this dose and toss it off; then you shall sing aloud the son you have been humming!"

With apparent readiness the pretended idiot came up and took the flask tendered her, which was used as a vessel. She nodded and mowed like the character assumed; she screamed with laughter, and said:

"Sainted mother of the stars, what an honor! And am I to drink good luck to you gallant gentlemen? It is funny, but as it is the captain's orders, here goes the liquor where it will do the most good!"

Then, making the motion as though to drink, she winked, and whirling around, she caught a grinning lubber unawares, and dashed the liquor in his open mouth. He was doubled up, and coughed and wheezed as though he meant to bring his heart up.

"She only knows one song," said the old man, as the laughter gave him a chance to speak by quieting down; "something she picked up from an old darkey run out of the Territory, and he babbled that when he had malaria."

"Oh, sing anything—that sweet voice of yours would make a psalm go down," said the chief, sleepily.

The supposed incapable hung her head one side and

with a good imitation of the negro, drawled, while patting Juba, and slightly shuffling, all helping to increase the general inclination to sleep:

“Possum married to cooney’s brudder—
Wished nex’ day she wed anuder!
'Case no clothes but ole Mudder Hubbard,
Not a drink nor bite in all de cubberd.
'Long come a jack wid a fresh corn-dodger,
Sneaked from de sack of a cav’ry sodger!
Still they thusted for some lickder
Till come up a cowboy in a slicker,
Ready fur to lead in all de dances,
But, afore ’twere off dey prances,
Wanted to know if de boss was handy?
Yas, he dar, and ain’t he a dandy!”

“Very funny,” said the marshal, rising with an effort and shaking himself like a watch-dog; “but if I knew any meaning to it, I am a Dutchman! Boys, we will have to shake down right here, I am dead beat.”

Yawns responded on all sides. As if respecting their hard-earned rest, the Mexican and his daughter moved about with guarded steps and flattened down the fire so that the blaze should not annoy their eyes. Then, withdrawing to the sill of the little house, they lit cigarettes and smoked. In the darkness they seemed an Indian couple courting.

In his cage, Frank Dalton looked out on the odd scene, hardly able to believe in the reality. The escort were already snoring, and the sentry over him and the horses were nodding.

Soon he was amid the sleepers.

Bob Dalton listened a little and apparently satisfied, he said to his accomplice:

"It has done the trick. Was it the loco plant only that you used?"

"Well, no, Bob," said the woman, rising; I found some dried belladonna and they had an infusion of that. The loco might have made them rip and rear and hurt Frank in the racket if they got to playing with their guns. Come on!"

"Yes, let us get him out; curse them who would treat a man like a monkey in a side-show!"

The two, with a very different step than that for the characters they had assumed, hurried to the cage and examined the fittings.

"Bless you, Bob, and you Jule," said Frank, in a low voice, though he needed not take the precaution; "wait a minute—let me think! it is the big man who has the key; in his under waistcoat pocket."

But the marshal had his hand on his belt, and he would shoot at a touch with that mechanical impulse of a man quick on the trigger.

"Let it go," said Bob. "I have better than that: some aquafortis in my other clothes, which I found precious useful under lock and key, I can tell you."

He ran to where he had made the change in his toilet and returned with a vial, covered with leather to prevent fracture.

With the powerful dissolvent he broke two of the bars, which he wrenched apart and Frank fell into his wife's eager arms.

Leaving them to exchange greetings, Bob started off to select the two best horses. His own was on the range, Lord knows where, and as for Julia's, foundered

by the hard riding, it had been sacrificed to furnish the baked meat for the feast?

"Mount and away," said Bob.

"Stop a bit. I want to carve my name on Dutch Pete's chest! I am not even up with him."

"I guess we are!" and laughingly he told him that he made the party eat the foundered horse!

Frank, when merry, was not disheartened. He renounced his wrath for the time.

"I should like the scalp of that Marbuckle," he said.

"You shall not have my knife for any such," replied the elder Dalton, firmly. "You two get away. You will see me soon, Frank. Let this blow over, while I get a band together. What we have done is nothing to what we shall do, now we are together again."

The younger yielded and rode off softly with his wife.

Bob walked back towards the horses, softly whinnying after the departing ones, and looked on the still bodies in the faint light from the fire, almost as dead as they seemed.

"Wonder if we gave them too much," he muttered. "I have not the pluck to go near any of them; this ain't my way of fighting, but it was such long odds, and I was bound to save my brother."

But, overcoming his weakness, he advanced to the sentinel, who had fallen into slumber with his bridle on his arm, so that his favorite horse should not be stolen.

"He is warm and breathes a little. They will come round after a while."

He laughed lowly as a fresh notion came.

With a great exertion he dragged all the bodies to the cage, and lifted them in, at random, even to the fat marshal, whom he had to raise with a lever; then fastening the door with the key which he did not hesitate this time to take from his fob, he left them.

He stampeded the horses, with the exception of one which he mounted, and which you may be sure was not a cripple.

Still he wavered. The sense of loneliness struck him.

"I will give them a chance for life," he said. "If any one is in sight this will fetch them."

Stooping in the saddle, he picked up a brand, swung it round his head and on its reviving into flame set fire to the pre-emption portable house. Dry as tinder, it was a bon-fire in a twinkling and blazed up along the big tree, shining on the bars of the cage which was crammed with the unconscious captives.

"Come what may," said he, "so fare it ever with those who come at the Dalton brothers!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SAND MONUMENTS.

Two of the doctored party were never the same men afterwards, and had to go home to the old farms East to live quieter lives; the others recovered; but it was some considerable time before they felt like closing with the Daltons.

Always excepting Marbuckle, who hated the brothers the more from his concluding that this last set-back was a trick of Bob Dalton's as soon as he learnt that he had got away from California.

The other exception was the fat marshal who has a capacity for putting away without much detriment to his corporation what would fit another for a grave.

These two busied about, made friendly by the common cause for revenge and to do something in the return-match which would prevent their being a laughing stock.

Ridicule kills a man on the frontier more dreadfully than the shooter or the sticker.

They did not chance upon Frank, who was reposing at his wife's ranche and beginning to chafe at hearing nothing from Bob, who had cautioned him to lay low.

His wife, glad at this late narrow escape, would

have liked him to keep away from the path of burning plowshares as the Methodist called it, but he whodoed when he saw Bob, riding up to the corral one evening, with a fine led horse.

He guessed by his manner that he had "pie" for him.

Indeed, although the senior kept still during the meal with that taciturnity and concealment of emotion which is English, though some folks want to make out it comes from the red man, it was plain to Julia's loving eyes that something was in the wind.

Next morning, when the two men walked out to the stables, pretendedly to examine the horse which Bob was making a present of to his brother, they spoke seriously when out of ear-shot of the house.

"Well, Bob?" he asked, impatiently.

"Well, I have gathered in the boys. I have been swinging round the circle and I have under hand all the tough cases south of the Platte, I do earnestly believe."

"That means a big heap."

"But I would not take all that wanted to go along. I have sorted them out, and I will have some forty at the cave-in at Three Rocks."

"Forty? ahem! that is the number of the thieves in the play we saw at Omaha, 'member?"

"They were told that you were laying the wires and they saw that I was to the fore again. They are burning to ride! And I have a big thing on the

ice to produce before them, a thing that sings up to thousands apiece!"

"No, Bob!"

"Do you know what a million of gold dollars weighs?"

"A million! hold hard, Bob!"

"I reckon, and I have heard the assay-sharps say something on that head, nearly four thousand pounds, bags and seals! It will take us forty to carry them away!"

"Snakes! who carries a million in gold these days, and out here? Is Jay Gould, or some other jay come down to buy a stamping-ground of the Mexicans for spot cash?"

"I do not care to waste my wind telling a story twice. We shall soon be among the boys to whom I am going to deal out the hand complete, and you will see that I have everything right."

Frank was not slow to accompany his brother, though Julia's premonition of trouble ahead made the farewelling sorrowful.

The two men rode to the highland. It is sandy and the rocks are sandstone, yellow and red for the most part, but they are of little consistency, and the extreme heat and ancient floods had made some stones of great size tumble into pits of their excavation, so that a New England farmer would think that a giant had been burying them to make a level.

Conspicuous from their nature as well as their position, three or four large stones, chased peculiarly by the sand-laden winds, but the slicks, cuts and

grooves attributed by the ignorant hunters to a fabulous ancient people, stood out on a slope.

They were of chalcedony, streaked with ruby and blood color, and from being diverse from all other stone hereabouts suggested that they had been one piece fallen from the skies and broken on rolling down. They had stopped at equi-distance, the first and largest overhanging a trail used from time immemorial and marked by a cross, roughly outlined by the white of the stone being cut free in relief from the red; probably the Spanish explorers buried their dead in some fight with the red rovers; the second stone was half-way up; the third near the ridge summit; above it two or three peaks gleamed, but there was no telling their dimensions, as the scrub pine and cactus covered them nearly.

A tape from the outermost to the last the other way would have passed over the middle one accurately.

They stood out of the sand above the height of a man, and resembled monuments more than natural monoliths.

On approaching, Frank uttered an outcry.

"There has been no wind to scoop the sand away," was what he said. "What has been at these rocks?"

"I had set the boys at work, for idleness is bad for toughs as well as tenderfoots," returned Dalton, drily.

"But the first wind will topple those isolated stones over."

"That is intended," replied his brother. "Don't be in a hurry. I shall tell you all about it bimeby."

Presently on the edge of a break, that is a deeply-cut canyon, a man showed his rifle and his head, his horse hidden in thorny bush. Bob took the handkerchief from around his neck and waved it by one hand after a serpentine fashion.

The sentinel, for he was one, disclosed himself, and responded with his scarf, of the same red color, in similar fashion.

He waved his scarf to another man, not seen, down in the natural cutting, and the two rode forward to greet the Daltons.

Frank recognized both and turned to his brother with a nod of approval on his choice.

"Don't say anything to Potts," said the latter; "That is, about his late record; he shot Roge Rickets in aiming at a deputy-marshal up in the country, and he is sore about it."

"Because he was so fond of his pardner, I see?"

"No, you don't begin to see. He is down in the mouth because he missed his aim."

"Glad to see you, Potts; how d'ee Sammy La Salle," hailed Frank, reaching forward and shaking hands—not less than ten times blood-stained—of the desperadoes.

"Potts, that is 'Pottowattomie,' Rook was a heavily-built man, more spry than a catamount; this contradiction of his figure and the springs that moved him had often led to his victory in scuffles; he was swarthy as a Mexican, and perhaps had a

dash of African blood—a suspicion which was not formed in words in his hearing; he was in a cowboy's costume, or rather a butcher's, his buckskin being hard and shiny with blood and grease but consequently as waterproof as a Towers poncho.

His companion was a more supple, slighter man, of half his forty years; a Mississippi River Frenchman, dark as an Indian and often called The Choctaw, as a son by adoption of that nation; he was so proud of his Gallic origin that he treated the nickname as a jest. He was lithe and swift as a tiger cat.

"All well?" queried Dalton.

"Why, yes, Bob," answered Potts; "some have not come to the roster, but we are five-and-thirty without you commanders."

"Fall in," added Bob; "we are going right down to hold the council. Frank is just fermenting for business and, as I told you, I have the finest thing of the season."

The four reached the break edge, where a sentinel, who had kept concealed, now revealed his presence. He was left there and the two couple descended the steep gully side by a rough road which only their trained horses could have used without breaking their legs and the riders' necks.

At the bottom a chaparral extended of all sorts of brambles and hideous palmettoes with spiky leaves like bayonets; a bare-legged man would have been so cut in ten minutes that he would bleed to death.



In the very heart of this dangerous jungle, the robbers had found a hole and a cave-in, caused long ago when waters ran where was now aridity, by a sinking river. They had hollowed out the tunnels, and made a large hall comfortable, and here housed not only the two-score banditti, but their horses and some pack-mules.

Another entrance, not used, was held in readiness for bad times.

They intended to improve the resort in time.

"It is a windfall—a bonanza," said Frank, delighted. "I wonder I never had a suspicion of such a cavity! I had scoured all this tract, I thought, minutely."

"I found from a hint or two that it existed," replied Bob; "but a wounded rattler assisted me; he killed a wild dog, which came to my bosom one night in dry camp yonder, and I took a fancy to him—poor whelp kicked out of an emigrant camp; and that snake nailing him riled me immense. I shot the reptile, I am telling you, but it sneaked off and I was so revengeful that I followed to make a finish and to slay its mate, if it had one. That took me right up to this hole where I nearly fell in. But I settled Mr. Rattles and am wearing his bones against headache right now in my sombrero. See?"

When the younger Dalton had got through hand-gripping and revived old memories with acquaintances, they passed the whisky around and formed a double ring round the two leaders to hear the story which was to unite the band.

"Brothers," began Bob, after consultation with his brother, "I guess the lock-up is our school. I return from the Californy calabooes with a plan matured in the shade of the prison cell, and the more closely combined as the rope halter dangled outside my window. Our great losses in previous campaigns has come from our being homeless. Look at the successful and rich depredators in cities, the safe-burglars, express-blowers, forgers and counterfeiters. They have homes, sometimes handsome cottages, villas or flats, and consequently, after they have executed a haul they have but to go home and wait till the hue and cry blows over.

"Contrast that picture with the way we play the fool after our hold-ups; we act like the red Injin in separating and seeking safety by the fleetness of that onsartin critter, the horse. Our only refuges are the farms of men whom we favored in happier days, but these received us then simply because we paid them richly and the blood money is a big temptation to them. Which of us ever lay down to sleep, though we were aching for repose, in those houses, without remembering the wolfish, sidelong look of the host and picking the revolver nipple which we stuck under the pillow or strapped to the wrist?

"Well, I propose that out of the common fund we settle each member on a ranch; we will run up his shanty by bees, just as the honest settlers do, and help each to stock. That will give each a home. But to prevent those who would get to like the home overmuch and so refuse to come off upon

adventure, we vow to use fire and steel against any one who abides in his chimney-corner when he has been summoned.

"But this will not be too often.

"I do not intend any more to fritter away blood and time in bidding peddlers stand and hand over. I say, let us make big raids and then we can wait for half a year before the need spurs us into another; it gives time to mature plans—and that is how the kings of our profession, to equalize the distribution of riches, act in the towns. In this way, as the country settles up, we shall have property, and when we want to sit with our old limbs crossed and smoke the pipe of peace, we can afford to do it."

The 'wild boys had never heard this doctrine preached; it rather clashed with the highwayman's time-hallowed "A short life and a merry one!" and the ruffians, who had always reconciled themselves to dying with their boots on, grimaced sourly; they were not the sort to hug a log fire and toast their slippered toes!

"I see that some of you think I am softening; that the iron of the chain has entered into my spirit. I guess not. But wait till you are richer in one hour than ever before in life, and see how the prospect of comfort for a lifetime will sober you down. Here's Frank, here—he has found a woman who loves him and he is so altered in a few weeks that I do not know him."

The men chatted together, and the bulk seemed persuaded.

"Let us hear about the fortune," said one man, who was the oldest of the collection, and had his son, a youth of eighteen, along—the kid of the band, as he was the daddy.

"I am getting onto it—that is what we are here for, Bart. Late days, Uncle Sam is getting mean. I do not know why, but he kicks at the exactions of the bloated corporations same as common men. The latest outrage is that, he wanting to convey some gold to New Mexican forts, the express cos. up and 'low that the terrorizing Dalton brothers make the trail dangerous!"

A roar of laughter resounded under the sandy vault.

"So the companies unite in saying that their charges must go up to engage the Pinkertons and the special gold guards. I know what I am talking about, as I palmed myself off onto a confab of one of the companies' directors in Denison as Wyoming Jim, which he has gone under, and they wanted my terms for seeing the treasure through. I wanted high money, for I said that, since Bob Dalton was back on his old prowling-ground and, with his brother, had hocused the celebrated Salton and his force of heroes, to carry bullion was next door to sartin death."

Most of the heads nodded. They had heard of the release from the cage and they had a higher opinion than before of the Daltons.

"This skeered them so that they elevated their

charges and the Big White Chief at Washington kicked, as I was telling.

"So he 'membered that he had sogers and Injin sogers, and scouts lying idle and he thought to rub the rust off'n some of them. In short, a million in gold coin is going to be transported through this section under guard of U. S. cavalry and Injin sogers, the latest attempt to make those bloody murdering Apaches useful in their old age. I do not want to fire a shot at a white soger; but, boys, I was raised where to kill an Injin was part of the religion! you all know what it is to see your father hand your mother the pocket pistol, which he had loaded up with extree care, and say in a whisper: "Don't let the reds take you with a shot in her, old gal, say?" Well, then, give me a mad coyote afore a nigger, a nigger afore a rattler, a rattler afore an Injin and then and thar I refooses to let him sleep under my blanket!"

"Bully boy, Bob!"

"But about that gold?" was the cry, while eyes sparkled.

"Well, this is the program, as fixed by the army officers, who know all about how to convey a train of booty through the untamed country, in course, better than men nursed in the mule pannier and cradled in the long-tom! The gold coin will be in strong kegs as usual, in army wagons, lined with sheet iron to resist bullets. In these little forts on wheels will be soldiers with rifles; that will be all we will have to deal with after the first rush.

“The vanguard is to be a cavalry of the new Injin sogers; they are not at ease in their new clothes which catches them under the arm when they rise to shoot, and their horses are not yet used to the Injin scent. I reckon to rush them right out of the way with a charge, firing our Winchesters, and yelling ‘Muerto, filhos de Vittorio!’ for they are of that old sinner’s ancient crew—‘Death to the Apash bloodspillers!’ They will think the avenger is onto them and they won’t stand for our bowies to tickle their interiors.

“As for the sogers, I don’t want no brushing with them; we have three boys here who deserted from the army, and it would rile them to have to stand their fire and not feeling prepared to hit back. So I have made it ready to block them off from interference. You have wondered why you have been a week busy in undermining those three rocks, standing in steps one above another. Well, they are fitting into my scheme. I have some miners’ cartridges coming by a messenger, which cartridges will send that top stone down on the next and the two on the last, which will fall all three in a heap across the trail. The sogers will be barred out while we settle the reds, consarn their hides! I do believe they have got white men’s hair plaited into their horsewhips, I swow! faugh!

“Then while the barkers are blazing, a chosen few will stave in the casks with sledges and scratch dirt with all that can be carried on mule and horseback.

"If we succeed better than it is fair to ask, why more of us will dip into the grab-bag, and there you have the whole of it."

Applause greeted the delivery.

Granting there was coming a gold train, Bob Dalton's plan offered good chances of success.

The ground favored it.

None of those who looked up at the steep doubted that the explosion under the monolith at the top would hurl it on its next dolmen below, and that the two conjoined with the last would represent an avalanche; flung at the right time, the mass, accompanied with sand and rubbish, must spoil the track and part of the train.

They counted a great deal on the surprise.

A number of shots in the utter wilderness has a demoralizing effect even on veterans.

So, on the eve of the attack, their scouts having fallen back before Capt. Migrain's "educated" Apaches, the pioneer body, the bandits were true to the rendezvous, as well as a party of six who had come in and were assigned to do the blowing up of the stone, that detonation to the signal for the onslaught.

Although the pass was as solemnly silent as the long ridge, or the canyon, the forty odd desperates were in ambush awaiting for the sound to start the uproar.

Bart's son, Laban Vlite, as the youngest, was given the post to discharge the bunch of giant powder cartridges; as by accident he might blow him-

self half-way to the moon or be caught in the running sand, it was not a coward's post.

The boy was proud enough of the mission and mounted, on foot of course, to the peak with a smiling phiz. Half-way up, he waved his hand joyously to his father.

"Spry and peart," says the latter, fondly; "I am not sorry that you assigned him to whar the shots will not find him, cap."

At the top, he paused to signal again, but something he saw in the lively quarter counseled prudence and he dropped down behind the summit rock quickly and with the cunning of the frontier boy.

Some token of the approaching train, whose numbers and bulk with so many heavily laden wagons would scare the vultures and beasts of prey, had been noticed by him on the height.

Soon a rumble could be heard by all in the far-off eastward.

Some dots crossed the sky, like aerolites seen in the day, as the dawning light spread. These were eagles or ravens frightened by the unusual visitors. The bandits moved more stealthily from habit even when they believed the coast clear.

It was the army train.

Shortly the robbers' scouts dropped in, reporting that all was going to heart's content. At more suspicious places the party had gone slow and with the outposts wary as in war.

But now, as the loneliness was deep, precautions had resumed a normal condition, though relaxed as

compared with those taken on the previous day.

The commander had passed the Territory without crosses, as it did not seem that the story of the treasure train had been floated over Oklahoma, where the scum was plentiful and would have risen at the intelligence.

All at once the boy aloft, hidden behind the stone and sitting behind the cartridges in their little heap and bound by one match, pricked up his ears; he was gazing steadfastly on the plain.

He could see the top of the Lone Tree, like a dark green and gray umbrella, the sparkling sands, the mirage to the west which a greenhorn would have staked his hand was a lake fringed by verdant cane. Then, a sort of yellow snake hazy but with glittering scales: it was the train, smothered in dust, while the soldiers' rifles caught the rising sun.

They must have breakfasted before the night was over, for the march was brisk. Perhaps the commander wanted to have water for the cattle, which were getting fagged with the trying road, a burlesque of a road, for the siesta or nooning.

He would not mistake the mirage, but the Indian scouts may have told of water beyond at fifteen miles or so.

The creaking of the wheels in the dry air was soon audible, the squeaking of some axles being loud as an eagle's scream.

The oaths of the teamsters were also audible and somehow seemed very out of place in that sublime

scene, under that glowing canopy and amid the stillness of the wilderness.

"It's blamed funny," muttered Bob to his brother; "I should not wonder but that train has just rolled over miles of earth that would yield pay-dirt by the hundred ton! Nature seems to behave like the mothers, she locks up the best preserves in the corners of the cupboard so that you get nothing nice unless you hunt for it."

"Is that boy reliable?" asked Frank, nervously, regarding the height where not a rag moved.

The solar heat was kissing the edge and, with the refraction, the saw-like crest wavered beyond the sights fixing the details.

"Don't worry about the kid; he is all there. His father answers for him. He is so fond of his father that he would do any mortal thing for him—pitch himself from the top there into the gorge at his word of command. All the Vlites are game though slow, as they would be of Dutch raising."

They were hushed, and retired into complete hiding.

It was necessary to avoid the least discovery from the Indian trailers.

Luckily for the bandits, a quarrel had arisen between the white scouts and these rivals. The former, few in number, had thought that undue preference was given to the reds. Discipline forbade their showing resentment openly, but they did their scouting sullenly, and a scouting in a hostile country must be done properly with the whole heart and

soul and mind. One omission in an absent moment and all the reconnoitering is not worth a row of pins.

We are not saying that the Indians are deficient in most of the requisites for scouting, for they beat a white man in some points, a sort of instinct having been established through ages of need to let nothing alarming escape the view.

But it was white men they had to contend with and such as had a wider experience in the same time than the reds; a white on the border does waste some time on a spree when he "comes in," but this is nothing compared with the lazing of a red, take the whole year through.

Besides, these scouts were mostly young men, brought up at a mission college, where the professors had tried all they knew to obliterate their born gifts, and then the army officers had tried farther to stamp out the initiative on which depends a good scout. Make such a man obey orders and he is trammelled—as well expect an acrobat to swing in the high trapeze in a swell's opera-suit, corsets and tight glove included.

So we have the gold-train white scouts sulking, and the Indian ones too conceited at their elevation to be cool and calm.

Besides the bandits had proceeded to their places from the outside, none crossing the trail, none leaving tracks where the Indian would look for them or where he would spy them without more study than they could be given on a march at a set place.

Anyway, the scouts went right on, remarked the sands hollowed out at the base of the lower stone without thinking anything but the winds had played with the earth, and went by the thicket in which was the robbers' retreat with no idea that forty or fifty men with their steeds had been harbored there.

The trail ran up higher beyond and it was possible that the boy behind the highest stone might be seen from that point. But the Apaches were not to be given the chance. Before they reached any eminence, while they were scanning the horizon without any premonition of evil, their nostrils inhaling the warming air with no whiff of the ambush, whoof! a puff of flame and faint smoke rose on the ridge. A series of bangs, almost one upon another, resounded and the clear atmosphere was striped by a funnel-shaped column. The cartridges had gone off well together.

The boy was seen disclosed on the edge of the crater of the sand volcano he had ignited.

One of the Apaches, true to his instinct to shoot at the source of a shot, fired his carbine at the boy, who was beginning to descend, traversely, as the incline was steep. Whether he was touched or not, no one had time to tell; he stopped short; but at the same time, old Vlite sprang up, with his pony under him scrambling to its feet, as if both formed one piece of mechanism, and aiming with his old long-barreled yager-rifle, he brought down the Apache who had fired at his boy.

The shot was the signal for twenty, almost at once, from both sides.

The bandits poured out of cover, firing with the aim they had taken before disclosure. The Indians replied but feebly, as it was a surprise indeed.

On the top of the height they had half ascended, a special detachment of half a dozen roadsmen started up and charged, yelling as their rifles cracked.

"Remember 1880! down with Vittorio's young men! death to the women-slayers!"

This peculiar cry upset the white scouts, who hesitated what part to take against men who seemed pervaded merely with hatred for the red men.

This led to the defeat of this whole vanguard. The Indians forgot their training, their duty, their orders how to fight, and broke separate for cover. The half dozen bandits had their orders how to deal with them in this case and followed, shooting to unhorse them and killing those who were entangled in the high-cavalry saddle before they reached the ground. The whites were jostled and knocked out of the saddle, stunned as far as possible.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXPLOSION.

This was not the main action.

When the powder was exploded at the base of the big stone, it bowed slowly to the up-shot column of sand and fire, as if to await its fall without displacement. But the undermining was a smart bit of engineering on Dalton's part. This caused a leaning forward and the slope was such that a swift slide was inevitable. On a large scale, but humorously like a colossus playing at one brick of a row, knocking down all the others, this slab dashed with increasing velocity against the next, ripped that out like a dentist yanking forth a tooth, and the two, just as purposed, heaved the third out, and rushed like the three horses of a Russian sledge harnessed abreast, down across the trail. They were shrouded in clouds of sand, dry as in Sahara, and not only was the road blocked against the soldiers following the wagons, but the smothering and blinding was complete. Horses reared, snorted and plunged, trying to scream, became unmanageable. The soldiers were dashed against each other and the confusion could not be worse in a regiment of down-East militia on a training day.

What was going on behind that screen of solid

rock and flimsy but equally impenetrable sand, was to be guessed by the shots, war-cries and the wild laugh which the sight of gold in immensity causes in the covetous.

"Sail in, boys!" the Daltons had shouted.

But from the instant when a bandit, too impatient to wait for the wielder of a sledge, hewed the oaken keg open with a hatchet, no encouragement was required.

It was almost impossible for those who were fighting off the gold guardsmen to remain from shouting while the gold coin chinked.

The teamsters were slain indiscriminately with the soldiers, shaken off their seats with their guns in their laps; the tarpaulin was ripped off each load with knives that seemed to dart like steel serpents; the kegs were rolled off and flung down to burst them; they were not merely knocked in the head, but smashed at the side. The road was spangled with the bright discs, and these flashed through the circling sand which would have choked the kicker-ups at another time.

The Daltons mingled with their followers in loading not only the saddle-bags provided for the errand, but their pockets and the bosom of their hunting-shirts.

Some converted their wide-leafed hats into bags by doubling the flaps over the filled crown. Others poured the gold into their pull-up boot-togs.

All this with that maniacal laughing, shouting

and animation noticeable in gold fields when starving men strike a nugget.

But the calm came to Bob Dalton. They might be circled by the soldiers on the other side of the barrier, and their gains would be but visionary.

"To horse and away!" was the well-known cry that he raised in his voice, recovering his old potency and steadiness.

As if his tones galvanized his men, they finished pocketing a last scooping-up; such as had dismounted and were not holding the others' horses got into the saddle, and in a twinkling they were all riding off as settled beforehand.

Before some of the dragons at last scrambled over the fresh fallen sand and by those huge rocks, the Daltons were out of sight.

Laughing at the idea of the soldiers overtaking them, though they were heavily weighted down, the robbers galloped off, to meet in the afternoon at a rendezvous, distant from the cave-in, reserved for great emergencies, like the citadel of a fortified town.

They met at the Ladders, a line of trees like beeches, at least as far as the branches stood out horizontally; they were unique, as happens on the way to Texas, where one is inclined to believe original settlers planted trees which did not succeed everywhere. In this thicket the bandits found a clear space, on a mound naturally formed, but bearing the air of having been thrown up for an entrenchment.

It looks to have been thrown up by a giant mole. But it is not hollow, Bob Dalton having probed it for miles and not found any such cave as he had wished for. He was always wanting to burrow for safety, since he found none in the air or on the surface for his tribe.

"Here we are," cried he, throwing himself off his horse, glad of the rest; "a good stroke, for we have crowded our chances!"

On the other side of the mound a reservation was set aside for the chiefs to collect all the booty and make the division as prearranged.

Dalton found it flattered the men to have a semblance of military rank, especially as the elders had taken a hand in the War, or were filled with traditions of it, if only as guerrillas in the Red River and the Arkansas campaigns.

"Out with your satchels, and eat and drink," added Bob, after posting videttes and leaving his brother to oversee the gold counting.

The men were chuckling and hailing one another as hunters meet after an expedition for big game, or sailors in different boats when their ship has gone down and they were drifted apart on the ocean.

Few were wounded, the Indians having shot very wildly.

"I would rather run the gauntlet of those red-devils armed with Springfields than as their fathers were, with those short arrers tipped with putrid liver," said Fighting Jewell of Arizona, mending a

rent in his shirt without staying the flow of blood from a bullet graze.

While they were making a scanty meal, for the boys had cast aside their grub from the pouches to fill them with coin, belated riders would dash up, report "no signs" on their track and proceed to repair damages or victual up.

These were cautious fellows who had made a wide circuit or traced a corkscrew route to throw off pursuers.

But it was reasoned that the chase would not be that snap-shot kind; the commanding officer would organize a pursuing party and that meant that they need not worry for some hours. Then they had their plan, derived from the course practiced in the old days when the Comanches raided Texas; one party would travel, leaving signs, and at a certain point break up all to singles, and so disperse, as the mist blows away from the cataract. Meanwhile the main body would be blowing in the gains at the border-town gaming-house or wine-dive and variety show.

Their appetites not appeased and the keener one for riches to be satisfied, all listened to the musical chink of the gold over the bank under the trees.

They smiled and jokes passed.

"Say, boyees, them air the riches—them eagles, which takes wings and flies away, I think."

"Our teller has got a long job on," said another; "he has been half an hour fair on the counting and he don't seem prepared to divvy yet."

"Well, what are we waiting for? Are we not all in?"

"Yes, cap."

"No, cap. I have not seen my son," said old Vlite, looking eagerly out through the network of branches on the deserted plain of ruddy sands over which most had traveled.

"Right! I do not see the kid anywhere."

"I bet he has not sold himself cheap!" said a young man who was fanning himself with his hat and sprawling at ease, though his bridle was round his arm as if he feared he might be glad to jump straddle and be off again. It was Cris Casey of the Utah trail, whom the railroad had thrown out of cattle driving, and who hated railroads as a canal-boater does.

"No, he is all pluck! He touched off them ca'tridges just right and he came tumbling down that bank as if he wanted to be in the forefront of the skrimmage."

"An Apache shot at him——"

"He won't shoot at no more," responded the old man, emphatically, red with pride at his youngster being praised by these daring spirits. "I plunked him, the blankety-blanked red son of a wigwam!"

"Oh, he's hunk—I saw him on a hoss! He was streaking it for the ma'sh over by the woody strip——"

"The marsh——"

"That's nothing, old chief! In this season even thar is not enough swamp thar to mire a skeeter. He's coming in, you bet!"

"Go right ahead," called out Bob; "all present, Frank, 'cept young Vlite, and we can put his share aside. Full man's share, for he does not deserve less."

Frank came over the mound with the gold sparkling in a huge basket of withes, which the two men with him had plaited in the brief space of his counting.

It was set down in the midst of the expectant road-agents.

At the sight they felt that their risk and fatigue were compensated for. Never had they seen so much coin in a mass; fresh from the mint, fire-new, the golden medals were brilliant and yet mellow with the rich tone.

"Bully for us!" said a purple-nosed man. "What an exploit! In a month the Daltons could have an army of a thousand! That rigging up the wall of stone in five seconds was a stroke of genius."

"I guess you know more about the gin-house than genius!" So spoke Bob, with a bitterness which had no open reason, though Blustering Gale O'Rock was not a favorite.

He scowled, but only muttered what he did not think prudent to blurt out to his commander.

"Oh, you will meet me on the mountain, will you?" said the elder Dalton, not hearing but interpreting the threat. "Oh, I am ready for you—perhaps too ready!"

"Hush!" said everybody, the view of the booty in so appetizing shape and hue making the prospect of a quarrel very second-rate excitement.

Frank did not smile. He stood by the basket and said, in a sad tone:

"We have jumped short, boys; here is scant two hundred thousand dollars."

A chorus of disappointment arose, as if their expectations, kindled by the prospect of a round million, made this sum for one sweep of the net insignificant.

"Pooh," said one, drawing a long breath; "this is drinking by thimblefuls when we thought to take by the jug!"

The rest were dumbfounded and after looking at Frank and then Bob suspiciously, ran their glance among their companions.

"I cannot make this out," said the purple-nosed man, as if he took it on himself to voice the general doubts. "Why, I thought that I had brought in that basketful myself! it hasn't any leaks, has it? A nice kettle of fish, when we were promised our square dig into a million. What did we leave in the kegs? little, next to nothing."

"Perhaps you will say that the captain's cheated you?" said Frank.

"Yes, call me a fraud," said Bob; "you had better," and his brow wrinkled, as it always did when he was going to commence firing. He had a six-shot in each hand.

"I don't say that, but—"

"Wait, then. Let us get this amount divided up and each lined with his swag. Then we will see about the next stage of the journey," said young Dalton, with whom his brother had exchanged a look.

"Yes, for the soldiers will be laid on our track."

"I deal," said Frank; "here is \$4,500 each the kid getting full share, which his father takes."

"Four thousand," sneered Galen O'Rock; "I have staked that on a turn of a card more than once in my time."

"It is take it or leave it," said Frank, knitting his brow.

They took.

They had nearly all filled up when the outposted men passed the word of a newcomer.

"My son," said old Bart, standing up.

No, it was a woman in a riding habit, badly damaged by the cactus, though faced with leather.

"Jule," said Frank; "you here!"

"Don't be angry. Besides, I was lucky enough to take a route that brought me near some one wounded in the prickly-pear chaparral half a mile beyond that end of this mound. Is it one of our friends or were you pursued so close and dropped a soldier?"

"It is my son," said Vlite, who could think of nothing else, and had taken his gold mechanically.

"Perhaps it was."

"Let us all go," said Bob. "We have no more business here." Then, in a whisper to Arizona Jewell, he added: "Keep an eye on O'Rock—he has not had all his deserts yet."

They mounted and rode under the guidance of the woman to the dense low scrub where she had seen a wounded man.

It was the boy. He was stretched at length on the moss, dragged down from a tree in his death-struggle;

his horse, gallantly carrying him to the last, was fatally wounded and was dying at a little distance, with the mute look of patient agony which sometimes they wear.

"Knife that nag," said Bob, sternly. And a keen blade was after the horse's jugular so quick that it never winked.

"Look at the blood—black already," said Dalton; "I bet you that one of those Apache used a copper bullet!"

"For luck, then—against a bewitched mark," said Frank; "they must be more civilized than that!"

"Let me see it," said Bob, gloomily; he looked at the strange missile and before he lifted his eyes off it cried: "Arrest O'Rock, Burly Bill, the Pryer!"

Such was the tone that the objects of the order as well as the six men, two to each who carried it out, were charged with surprise.

At the same instant, young Vlite to whom Mrs. Dalton had given a preparation of ammonia, revived greatly.

His filmy eyes cleared and he stared round, smiling to see his father had escaped and nodding to his younger captain. Then perceiving that the three men were in custody, with pistols ready for them on each side, he smiled more joyously.

"You have got them to rights!" he gasped; "they are traitors. They took as much gold as they could carry and dropped the extra load into the sulphur hole! I saw them—I saw them!"

"You lie!" stammered Gale.

"I saw you, and Bill and the Pryer—but you led and carried most."

His head fell back in the woman's arms, but it was exhaustion of bodily force, not want of indignation.

"You see, boys," said Bob; "this accounts for some shortage. They stowed the gold away to divide among themselves hereafter. It seems to me that they will have that diverted gold only in the hereafter."

"My son? is he coming round?" said Vlite, to Julia.

She said nothing, as she could not understand the wound's importance.

"Take those turncoats to the sulphur hole the boy spoke of," ordered Bob. "As for this poor lad—" he paused—"we cannot hide him when it will take all the powers and cunning of hale men to baffle the hell-hounds even now laid on our track."

"But you cannot leave him," protested the old man.

"Why, no; those Apaches would finish him. But that is not what I fear. It is that they will have some white man with them who will feel all the weight of a clue to our whereabouts, and will torture to obtain it."

"A United States officer do that?" said Jule.

"Oh, some of the train men will do anything to curry favor. It is just this way, the old motto holds good: Dead men tell no tales."

"Boss," said Vlite, proudly, "that boy will die game."

"No trusting! tied up by the thumbs—you know."

"I know my boy!"

"I will stay by him!" said Jule; "they may hold me as a prisoner, but—"

"As a hostage. Think how that will pull down Frank," returned Bob. "No, the boy is hit with a brass bullet. That villain, Bill Burley, had some from a Mexican, and I saw him trade with O'Rock. As for the Pryer, with his weasel face, he was always with them. They shall hang together. Come, boys, to where they await their fate."

Beside the dying youth were left only Julia and the sorrowing father.

All the others accompanied the two leaders out of the thicket edge over the sands to a natural pit; yellow dross was mixed with salt, all dirty, rusty, ugly, as if the spot were accursed. The earth was trampled hard into a depression from all sides, where animals had come, in former times, when this was fertile and the alkali had not the upper hand, to drink and lick.

Not quite in the centre, to the east, a large and long crevice, about four or five yards wide, ran to a distance; in its midst was a hog-back ridge which a man might straddle and so cross the cavity without having to go all the way round for a hundred yards. On each side, away down, the pit extended, with brittle, crumbling sides, sulphurous, menacing, the depth unknown. An old crater of a volcano, perhaps.

No vegetation in the neighborhood. The fumes at one period had poisoned the air.

Just at the mouth, in a pocket of stone, the false highwaymen had dexterously tossed the gold in their bags and pouches; by hanging on a lasso, one of the

bandits went down and brought all up in two journeys.

This influx of wealth softened their hearts; the fact was that they found the excuse for the traitors that they would have done the same themselves but for it not having occurred to them.

Voices rose, encouraged by the three prisoners, appealing looks and air of vexation at their treasure being discovered.

This made some laugh, and these hearty men are rarely cruel when laughter disarms them.

"Turn 'em loose, afoot," suggested some.

"Let them race with the Indian scouts!"

"The fate of the deceiver is death," said Bob.

"No, give them a chance, captain!" was the almost universal cry.

"What! you are willing to kill that boy of Vlute's rather than he should fall into the enemy's hands and be forced to divulge, and you would spare these scoundrels?" cried Frank, indignantly.

They hung their heads at his flashing, burning glance.

"Peace," said Bob. "They shall have a chance—"

"Good!" but the prisoners knew the speaker too well to believe their prospects were brightening.

"Indeed," he added, "It is the sea-pirate's chance, and it fits with us land-pirates, I reckon. Gag them, that their death-cries shall not call the foes." It was done. "Fasten their hands behind them." So done. "Set them in a file, that braggart Gale in front, on that ridge. Urge them on with knives, and if after starting one or more cross that perilous bridge, why,

he is welcome to his life. Only don't let him come within range of me after."

The revulsion of feeling in the ruffians was quick and great. The terror of the three was like it. The former saw a "sight," and such are rare in the monotonous life of the borderman.

The file of three was formed and they were forced to stand on the fragile ridge.

"If they try to sit down or rest, shoot them. I would rather the sound brought the foe upon us than that they should evade their doom by weakness or cowardice," said Dalton.

Frank turned away towards the thicket, where his wife was still succoring the boy.

Out of bravado, to seem game under their comrades view, the trio marched right boldly on the ridge. It was a rope-dancer's feat to accomplish, and after a few steps, when the last was fairly embarked on his voyage, they took a pride in being the center of all vision.

They even joked when one made a mis-step or the crust broke way.

The leader, as the heaviest man, had the hardest task, as he had to test the way. But on he went; at half way, or more than a hundred yards off, he began to hope that he should succeed.

But here an odor, which had been faint up to this point, became perceptible; it was like the smell from old-style lucifers and gave a suffocating feeling.

The last man caught it worst, or had the weakest head, for he coughed, and so violently that he lost

his footing. He threw his hands out at random and clutched the one preceding him, who thought only of his safety and tried with a kick to set himself free. The other merely tightened his hold and the two came down with a crash on the ridge, which smashed under the double weight. They interlocked and rolled into the crevasse.

Behind the solitary rock was a gap which he could not leap, had he sought to retrace his steps.

He laughed.

"I always won my p'intns by going alone," he shouted, through the gag, which made an odd, muffled effect.

The only sound in the narrow gulf was of the two falling; bandaged they could not raise a shriek.

But the reek increased and Gale felt that he must hurry on if he would avoid being choked.

"The idjits," he muttered; "they did me the best turn they knew how by muffling up my mouth—I shall trick them yet!"

Indeed, he progressed well. But by this time the two falling ones had struck bottom—a false crust over the hidden fire which it had long sealed from ascent. A spout of fire and blue vapor shot up as from a fire-engine and the man on the ridge was deluged in a twinkling. This time, agony made the gag useless; he emitted a horrible scream, like nothing human, and descended with the column of sulphurous water and flame, like one of those pith balls which dance on a fountain jet.

With this ebullition the hidden spring from hades

seemed content. The fumes stole up a little while, as the bandits gazed at the void in awe, and then all was clear in that translucent atmosphere.

"It is over," said Bob, to the spell-bound bandits. "Come away. Old Harry has undertaken his cremation!"

His voice broke the charm of horror. All followed him back to the thicket. To their surprise, the boy was still alive and, what was more, so much better, thanks to the ministrations of the woman and the father, that one might entertain hopes.

But Dalton was as inexorable here as to punish the cheats.

"He cannot possibly live," said he, finally. "Those Mexican bullets of copper are certain death, and don't you forget it when we are tackling them."

Julia clasped her hands in appeal to him.

"Short or long, that is all we have to decide," continued the elder Dalton; "to let him perish in lingering agony or to give him the send-off which, remember, we swore was to be his who proved an encumbrance on our flight."

As usual, they had taken the robbers' oath to slay the wounded rather than be encumbered.

"My curse on ——" began old Vlite.

"Your oath," Bob reminded him.

"Good-by, lady," said the boy, fondling Julia's hand feebly, "Good-bye, dad—."

He was resolved.

"I say, cap, let it be with a pistol; it seems to me that the knife is only for pigs and sheep."

The more they admired his coolness the less they wanted to carry out the death-sentence.

"Say," he spoke again, but with an effort. "Of course, my father has my share?"

"Yes, yours is a full share—you behaved like a man," said Frank.

"Die like one," said Bob.

"Fire away, captain," said the kid, trying to rise.

But there were no volunteers for the task. The thought of the father's curses alone would have determined them.

"We are losing too much precious time," said Bob, impatiently. "Short or long, it is. Draw leaves with one another and the winners pair till it is tapered down fine."

They picked up leaves and began to draw in pairs as directed. It settled down to old Vlite and the senior leader.

Bob was not sorry that he lost, spite of his unalterable determination.

"It is heaven," said Vlite; "as Abram in the good Book was willing to sacrifice his son, I will save my own from lingering pain. Take care of yourselves, boys. Cap, I leave you to convey my share whar it will do most good—the mother of this here boy is living, at last accounts, in New Bethlehem, Tioga county, Pennsylvany—give her my gold and the boy's!"

"You bet! And mine if she wants it!"

So spoke Frank and Bob in a breath, glad to buy forgiveness.

“Good-bye—take my hoss, one on ye. I will jine ye pooty soon.”

They were glad to move away, some mounted, but more on foot, loath to go while hating to see the paternal execution.

None looked back, curiosity not being strong enough to overcome the respect for the heroism in the situation.

They heard a pistol shot, and thrilled—another, and were—nay, pretended surprise.

“He never wanted two shots to puff out that poor flame of spark,” said Frank, turning.

“You need not return,” said Bob, looking to the thicket; “I knew what would happen! The old man killed his son and then himself. If we escape they shall have a tomb wolf-proof!”

“Ride on,” said Frank, ashamed of his own weakness, which made his voice shake, and bending a harsh look on his wife, weeping.

He knew that the less human his followers were the more they would be terrors of the border.

“We have the gold,” said one rider, suddenly, and at once laughter broke out, and the same man, taking the cue from Bob’s smile, began to sing in a low voice:

“It all depends upon your luck!
Some dies by sting of lizzard;
Some travels days and ne’er sun-struck;
Some faces out the blizzard.

I’ve seen a tough who toted traps
With Old Bill Bent—who’s sporty,
And plugs plum-center t’rown-up caps—
Though he is past twice-forty!”

And in the same guarded tone, joyously, the tragedies forgot, clinking their gold to the time, all sang:
"Life all depends upon your luck!"



CHAPTER VI.

THE SULPHUR HOLE HOLDUP.

When a serious robbery is committed it is the habit of the authorities at a safe distance to rake the plundered ones over the hot coals, and to thunder what they would have done and would do under the circumstances.

Somehow or other Capt. Migrain's "pets," the reformed red-skins, came in for the brunt of the reproof from headquarters for the Daltons' bold swoop.

They found the dead bodies of Vlite and his son; they saw traces of the tragedy in the sulphur hole, where no smoke rose over the submerged traitors, and here they picked up a few gold ccoins.

But the bandits were not to be caught up with.

The fact was these had not even sought refuge in their cave.

Frank and Bob saw that they would with difficulty restrain desperadoes who had filled their pockets to overflowing, and they "allowed" them to scatter and go on a bender. At a certain hour they were to meet again.

This disappearance of the foe completely routed the regulars who were fain to attribute the rush to some of the cowboys whose occupation hereabouts was

pretty well done up by the boomers, the Scandinavian colonists and the rustlers.

In truth, in their passage among such of the cowboys as had settled down to try to manage a small herd, more or less with altered brands, Dalton's men had liberally parted with their gold, so that it was flush times along their trail.

So Unc' Sam concluded that it was a fluke—a sudden foray, and the performers in it almost indefinable.

In three months the wind that blew had not the clank of a cavalry sabre or the rattle of a stack of cartridges going into the rifle magazine in it. All was peace and in its calm Frank, awaiting the renewal of adventures, on the reappearance of the gang, chafed like a dude in spring change of underwear.

He laughed at a report that Migrain alone was still discontent with the fruitless quest for the gold-robbers.

"They shall pay me yet," he had said; "no or'nary rogues originated this dash; it was those Daltons united again," he 'cutely divined.

But he was ordered West, even as he had scent of Frank's ranch, and the robbers laughed at the detectives getting points on their movements.

Bob had really perfected himself as a leader of rovers during his Californian captivity. He came back with the organization scheme in his head as clear as crystal and as straight as a dye.

It was based on the simple plan of bribing or terrorizing all the small ranchers and poor men into conniving at their felonies and harboring them when hunted; paying for food, fodder and horses with a free hand,

the good old plan of Robin Hood and the later highwaymen, taking from the rich, particularly government and corporations which have no feelings to be sympathized with.

"The biggest slump you ever made, Frank," Bob would say when in a preaching mood, "was when you made that old post-mistress on the Santa Fe road turn out her till for a beggarly couple of dollars, she saying it was her private cash and you pretending it was the Gov's—you ought to have let it go at that."

Therefore, it was next to impossible for a stranger to spy about without "stumbling into a hole," one he would not get out of by himself.

To make things more secure, Bob had completed the furnishing of the cave, and with its second outlet widened so that one could lead a horse or pack-mule out, it was pretty well a marvel.

It was pleasantly cool and it was resolved not to do too much cooking in it so that the smoke could give a hint—a common mistake in that region where the least vapor is visible afar.

The boys were beginning to flock in. They had spent their money and were eager to repeat the great gold sweep, but these do not occur once a year in the wilderness.

Bob came round to tell Frank that the nucleus of the band was already assembled and that an enterprise might be attempted to see how the boys were after their dissipation.

They did not talk business before Julia, but she guessed the topic.

When Frank returned to her, he found her in a brown study.

She was humming a tune, but she would have been puzzled to say what it was, she was so absent and distressed.

She had never been the same woman since the death of the Vlites had shown what a tragic family she had married into.

"If I did not know you, Jule, I should think you were brooding over something evil," said the young man; "you would not meditate double-dealing, hey?"

She smiled sadly, but her face was pale and she faltered:

"You are going to leave me."

"Just for a ride round," he replied. "You cannot expect me to run a cattle ranch from an easy chair on the veranda, can you? Say, can't a fellow's brother call to take him out on an excursion but you should sour up and look black?"

"Your brother is very welcome, and I wish he alone were your companion. But if you go to stay any time, I wish you would let me go—"

"With us? Not a bit. We had you on the last trip and has set you back fearful. No more Julia in my expeditions."

She sighed deeply.

"To be plain, I feel warlike and hostile, duck! This time, I shall bite and I shall kick, or else I should never be able to lay off in the wet season."

"Well, I want to go home. I am lonely here, and it will drive me crazy—the sougning of the wind, the lash

of the sand, the lowing of the cows gored by the young bulls harrowing them because the herd is too numerous to be attended to as they would East. Besides I cannot converse with these men about the ranch."

"Well, no, they are not company for the likes of you, Jule—I 'lows that. What are you driving at, anyway?"

"That cave, though Bob cracks it up so highly, does not please me neither!"

"It would not. Well?"

"I think a turn in the town would dull my thoughts."

"The town? Then you would not care to go to my mother's, or my strait-goods brother's—"

"No! It would lead to their being harried in case you are hunted again. They will go for me."

"I dare say they would, my girl. I will give you leave, money and the outfit. Only, I shall stay on the road the longer for your breaking up the home!"

Julia only wept. She had been woefully disappointed when she found that the great gold haul had not pacified the adventurer, and that while they were well off, he was turning to plunge into the conflict anew.

She did not dare say it.

"Very well; we will put you where you may hear something valuable to the brotherhood, for our gain or our safety. Frank Dalton's wife shall be rigged out in style anyhow, with all the fixin's from Paris, I tell you. Only go careful, Jule! I own that I have a hot head and that the distance is short between my hand and my shooter handle."

"You need not be afraid of me that way, Frank," she answered.

Her tone was woeful, for she had no doubt that love for adventure overpowered all other feelings in her husband.

Frank was not sorry that she went. He did not dare guess what would ensue in this next enterprise. He went away with his brother, relieved as a burro of its pack.

Bob interrupted him as he was whistling a dance tune, saying:

"It may be hard on you, old man, but it is for the best that you are separated from the girl. Their sex are all very well as helps, as they ferret out everything, but sooner or later, as wives, they pick up secrets, and these may be too hot to hold in their delicate little paws. Besides, in this new project, we have to face hard nuts to crack."

"What is it?"

"A friend in 'Frisco, one to whom I owe my escape, though he did not fail to charge for his services, is allied to the Hebrew colony there by marriage. The people accept him to a degree as one of themselves, and he hears what is going on. The celebrated diamond merchant, at least celebrated in Europe, Saumon Kohnson, has been on here, out West, selling and swapping diamonds. He brought with him the finest stones that Hatton Garden, the London center of diamond trading, could supply, newly dug from the Bluefields, old ones from Brazil and India; splendid gems! Would that we had

known he was coming through, though it was by the Northern Pacific. He is afraid to return the same way, and besides, he is to meet some brother merchants on the Texas Pacific at the Sonora branch, to receive pearls from the smugglers of Panama.

"My informant says that Mexico is so troubled that he does not believe that old Kohson will dispose of his diamonds, but he will not fail to buy the pearls."

"A double load!" said Frank, with eyes sparkling.

"Why yes, it looks first-rate, only there is a hitch. I should not wonder but the old coon, averse to shedding blood personally, as becomes his creed, will hire some of the frontier-bullies to be in the express car along with his trunks; the more precious stones he carries in a wallet sewn right into his shirt."

"He shall be stripped to the buff," said Frank; "though the shock gives him the shakes for life."

"He may hit upon those blowers who will drop their hands if covered with a muzzle of steel, but then again he may hire some pistol-knights who won't be behind in the game."

"Stuff, Bob! a Jew will never pay for enough guards to meet us on even terms. I consider that we have a fat lot!"

"So I say, let us go in force. One never knows who may be on the train, and I am not going to be beaten off, though it is a pitched battle for the pearls and diamonds."

"Pearls and diamonds! Say! here is a chance to retire and take Jule over to Europe to show the crowned heads of that played-out world how an American beauty rakes the line in wearing good clothes and jewelery."

"Yes, your little boys shall play marbles with Kohinoors!" said Bob, always eager to please his brother in any whim.

They said no more till they reached the cave.

Twenty men were there lounging and furbishing their weapons. In concordance with the warning about fires, they were regaling on canned provisions, the fruit of a robbery on their road to the tryst.

While they were having supper, five or six more came in, who were left as guards while the rest started on an early morning march.

At their second camp, a messenger overtook them; he had been to Frank's ranch, where Julia was departing, and thence to the cave.

He brought news from a correspondent at El Paso that all the talk there about the Daltons robbing the U. S. gold train had frightened several millionaire passengers. Kohnson had certainly the scare badly. He vowed that he could not continue that route, would renounce a visit to New Orleans, down on his program, and took coach for Santa Fe.

"If he goes to do business in Denver, we lose him," grumbled Bob. "Somehow or other he must be turned our way. I think I can tempt him, but—"

"We want an emissary to decoy him personally," said Frank. "Will you let me go?"

Bob sized up his brother as though he had never seen him before.

"Play the confidence dodge and outwit a Jew," he said, smiling. "If you do this, Frank, you may turn me down. You shall be the king pin in the company; you hear me."

Frank set off that night, with a led horse, intending to shift till he reached a telegraph station. Here he flashed a message to Pueblo, to a friend, whom he was assured would board the Israelite's train and following to Denver, or wherever he went, hold him till Frank was let loose on him.

Luckily Kohson stopped on the road from loving luxury, being ill-habituated to the rush of American travel.

Frank was waiting at Henrietta on the Denver City, with his brother in touch, when he got word by the wire that the Jew had bitten at the bait, that the Southern mill-owners and planters were to hold a convention at Little Rock and that they were flush and "on the buy" for pretty things to take home to their wives—and other folks.

Frank rode off himself to combine with Bob, and they regulated their plan to the least detail.

Meantime they had executed a few robberies just to keep their hands in. It was imprudent, but the boys were hard to keep the curb upon.

Just before the train expected to run by Trepid Springs, unless flagged to stop, the engineer heard

a fog torpedo go off. He saw nothing whatever but the white smoke on the track to justify his caution, but he reversed brakes by signal and slowed down.

A similar detonation behind announced that it was a signal for the stopping of his train, and he hesitated what to do. He might have put on speed again and rushed, but he saw a group of horsemen emerge from the bushes, which had been cut and piled to be burnt off the track, and he considered by the guns in their hands that he was in the net.

He turned to his fireman and said:

"It is a hold-up!"

"Yes, and a train robbery by those Daltons! They have been operating along the line this past week. Bob was at the head and I know it, for a friend of mine was taken in and ransacked so that he thought they were going to have the toe-nails off'n him. They handed back his watch, one of those that it takes an hour to wind, and Bob said: 'Much obliged, but our life is short! Keep honest and you may spin yours out long enough to own that critter some time yet.'"

They had stopped the engine, and well they did, for the riders first spied cantered up, some on one side, some on the other, and leveled their rifles at the two in the cab.

Then they called them out, under the barrels.

They obeyed.

"Daltons," said the captain of this vanguard, significantly. "You come like lambs—you will not continue your journey like mutton."

In the same way a party had attended to the rear. They were clad like them in the semi-military uniform Dalton made the gang wear when on active service, but were more recognizable from all having on the left arm a handkerchief tied with two "ears" at the ends.

The train thus stopped and secured head and stern, to use a nautical expression, the elder Dalton advanced fearlessly with his picked men.

These were more varied in apparel, some in red shirts, like miners, and some in the classical cowboys' attire. These were mostly disguised about the face, with handkerchiefs tied on, or a smear of red clay or burnt wood, or yet a rude mask of crape.

This variation suggested that the bandits had added to their forces from the neighbors.

All were armed with fine rifles and revolvers.

Soon they had the engineer, his stoker, the conductors, porter and other officials in a string outside along the train, under the guns.

Contrary to expectation, the express-car was not attacked; they fastened the doors with a wild grapevine, and guarded them and windows.

"If you shoot out," said they to some one inside who had sworn savagely, "we shall blow a hole through the car with fog-signals, and if you are tunneled it will be yourself to blame.

The train was now at their mercy.

The first excitement was over.

In the midst of the stillness of expectation, Bob Dalton, with two men at his back, who held a re-

volver in each hand, mounted in to the principal car, with the air of men who were performing a part written down on paper.

In this car were twenty swell passengers, half of them men in the prime of life and with the utmost the world gives to make them want to live. They might have made a rush and, though one or two would have been killed, and four or five maimed, the rest must have mastered the trio and saved their reputation as men.

They did nothing of the sort. They had come to that period of rich men's lives when selfishness rules and they did no fighting save by proxy, and for the general gain.

Bob counted on this.

He looked up and down the aisle, and picked out at a glance the Jew dealer in precious stones, the chairman of a syndicate which will not let them become cheap for fear that common folks may wear them! He was stout, with a triple chin, with the greasiness which fine linen cannot attenuate, and his black eyes seemed to be glass, with a tremulous luminous jelly behind them, as he was shaken by fear.

"Ma tear, ma tear, what will I do?" he said, turning to a man in a long gray beard and with shaggy gray brows, who sat over against him; "I cannot understand what I have hired those Texas rangers for? they have not fired a shot! they are schwindlers! I am sheated!"

"This is Mr. Kohnson of London," said Bob

Dalton, walking up to him and exchanging a wink not perceptible to outsiders, with the gray goatee, who can be guessed to be Frank Dalton.

"No, Kohnson ish going home by another train!" said the Jew.

"You lie—you are that man."

"No, I am not a Kohnson—"

"That is quite right! you have taken that name, as you take most of your possession, to deceive and wrongfully. I will tell these gentlemen, your fellow-passengers, who you are. You are the youngest and last of that family who sent under contract condemned stores re-canned to the British Polar expedition and the poor sailors died of disappointment in the eternal snows on opening that arsenal of the devil's poisoning which you had tinned up to turn a penny!"

"Faugh!"

A murmur of horror pervaded the car.

"You amassed such a gain that you were able to hush up the crime in Parliament. We should have lynched you in America. Well, you put your money out at usury and your agents are infamous in London as oppressors of the poor tradesman. You lastly went out to South Africa and you organized a ring of diamond dealers by which not a diamond cuts glass or is used in the arts but you tax it. That is perhaps legitimate business; but you stopped on the border of Sonora to gather for carriage to Europe the pearls which the smugglers have abstracted from paying duty to the Mexican govern-

ment. You are a cheat all down the line, and ought to be punished. I shall take twenty thousand dollars for your murder of the seaman on the unmelting ice, twenty for your squeezing the poor of London, twenty for your diamond swindle, and twenty for your smuggling. In all eighty thousand dollars—”

“S’welp me suffering Moses, I have not—Mr. Baumgartner,” he said to the disguised Dalton, “won’t you swear that I do not carry money and that I was robbed in a skin game at—”

“It is quite right,” said Frank, plucking off his false beard and brows, and showing his laughing face; “you were lifted of some of your pocket money—if I may be allowed to advise my brother.”

“His brother? this robber’s brother! I am lost!”

“No, the boot is on the other leg,” returned Bob; “you are found. Go on, Frank, with your suggestion. You cannot have traveled in this cute gent’s company without picking up a wrinkle or two.”

Kohnson threw his head back and groaned.

His eyes rolled and he made a move to rise, with his gaze settling on a sandwich-case in the baggage rack over his companion’s head.

“I advise you taking his ransom in pearls and diamonds,” continued Frank, reaching up and taking this paltry looking metal case down. “You will find a hundred thousand dollars worth in this, while the other trunks and boxes contain a lot of sham that he meant to bluff a robber off with.”

In spite of the diamond dealer’s trepidation, Bob’s

keen eyes perceived that his emotion was overdone; at least he fancied that even Frank might have been in some way deceived.

Only where was the deceit?

The old sandwich-case contained pearls and precious stones, done up in tissue paper. This was all very well too, but Frank whispered that the old rogue had boasted his possession of a liquid which would test diamonds and rubies, in fact all crystals—a preparation akin to the acid by which gold is tried. False stones and those patched up of scales laid on each other and cemented, would fly asunder at the touch.

They found this vial of stuff on the Jew, instead of the secret packet of valuables, next his skin.

To handle it, Bob actually placed his rifle in the hands of one of the passengers.

Frank did not observe this at the time or he would have corrected such bravado or carelessness.

"We'll soon see about this touchstone," said Bob, making as if to pour some of the stuff from the bottle on the first paper of gems that he opened. But he was watching the owner's features and they disclosed no feeling.

"You are a fraud from away through," he cried; "these are bogus and the other in the trunks are the genuine. But I am not taking any risks this trip—I shall collar both lots!"

Kohnson began to howl and snatch at the bag, but the rifle was taken from the holder's hand and

held him off. The robbers retreated, leaving him in a fit.

During this time, the express and the passenger freight cars had been invaded, though the special guard of Texas rangers had exchanged shots with the band, spite of the warning they received.

But the banditti, used to these affrays, used the trainmen as living shields while making their charge, and the rangers had to fire wild for the sake of their pay, and not to kill the company's employees.

Frank had well posted the party, who knew just what to clear out of the trunks and cases.

As these actions had been at the same time, they did not consume many minutes.

With the Jew howling like mad at having been plundered and deluded by his mock fellow countryman: "Baumgartner," the bandits rallied and retired, carrying the trainmen with them as a "mantlet," as the defence is called in military lingo, till they were out of rifle range.

"Say, Bob," said Frank severely, as they rode off in a compact mass, "what did you do that devilish stupid thing for of letting a stranger hold your gun? You might have been laid a stiff by the very cartridge you inserted."

"I calculate not," rejoined the other coolly, "let me tell you that I have a secret lock on my rifle—nobody touches her off but this child—see that!"

Then they laughed.

It was a good thing that they took both collec-

tion of precious stones, as, curious to say, it was the genuine ones which the acid shivered to atoms, and the real pearls which it discolored, so that they lost all their labor from the lie told to Frank in his disguise.

The rage of the bandits may be conceived, but they had let the train go on, and the Jew was out of their reach.

Lucky indeed that they had escaped without loss of life.

"I shall even up with that rascal if I have to follow him home to England," muttered Bob, looking up ruefully from the heap of spoilt gems, now so much dross.

CHAPTER VII.

A DARING BANK RAID.

Kohnson laid over at Denison, though he had what the boys called the bulge on the Daltons so far as he had spoilt their spoils, though he did not learn that they had fallen into the trap till afterwards, he left like the man who cut off his nose to spite his face; no man could better dispense with a nose, by the way!

At the town he could not keep still; he orated in the hotel saloon about baffling the notorious highwaymen till he made honest men sick, after having divided their first sympathy with him. Men accustomed to make and lose thousands in a turn of the card or of the spade do not mounth over their mishaps.

The only man who listened still to his peculiar trumpeting was Marbuckle, who, like him, had an undying grievance against the Daltons and rejoiced at their having been fooled.

It did not take many drinks and smokes to cement the acquaintance between them.

"Look a' here," said the American, "I think I see the streak of pay-dirt for you in this accident. You have been associated with Frank Dalton long

enough to know him by the eyes any how wherever you meet again. And you have the advantage over him that you are a representative Jew. I mean no offense but, plainly, you look just like any of your people picked out of a thousand. So you ought not to hesitate to figure in a decoy plot to get those rogues into custody."

"I am staying here, though my wife and a family of nine are wanting their papa home," said Kohnson, savagely; "I will do anything and spend much money in putting them down!"

"I think I see a way of downing them. I found out where Frank used to keep himself when resting, on a ranch where his wife was living."

He gritted his teeth at the remembrance of the girl he had lost.

"She has left him, but he runs the ranch still, and a letter will always find him there. So far good when we want to send him the bait, see! As for the woman, she has been loaded with money, and she has put some money in the Constitutional Safe-Deposit Bank in El Reno. That is right up yonder in the Territory."

"She would not bank there for nothings?" queried Mr. Kohnson, thoughtfully.

"I thought you would guess that. She is putting the stuff on the shelf there, to get an insight into the working of the machine, so that the boys can trot along into the town one of these days and clean it up."

"But they would know her."

"No, they would not; she pretends to be a widow and is under a good wearing name. She is Widow Tremaine for the once. Her husband found good introductions for her, for he is mixed up with first-class people in the country. With corn under fifty, a man must hustle with all sorts to keep in line, I tell you. Well, these ye'r Daltons are aiming to raid that safe-deposit, and you pin that in your hat!"

"Pin in my hat?"

"Keep it in mind; if they are sore at your having gulled them—"

"Yes, if they touch the diamonds and the pearls with shtuff, s'welp me! they will ruin them all! mine gracious!" and he wrung his hands.

"Well, now is the time to strike the fish: Have you the pluck to follow up the track of a letter to be sent them as from one of your tribe, and personating him, lead the boys into the bank which we shall convert into a trap for the gang."

"Risk my neck?"

"Well, they will shoot round reckless, unless we are mighty rapid in springing on them."

"What is the reward for them?" asked Kohnson slowly.

"I tote it up as a clear ten thousand dollars—two thousand pounds sterling, for the pair of brothers, as well round here as in Californy."

"Ten thousand," repeated the Jew, using the larger figure for the more tempting; "that is not much when

my assurance policy may be vitiated by my courting the danger."

"We will fix that; we will have you one of the spectators doing business in the bank when we pounce on them."

"But ten thousand, less your share—"

"Share nothing! You are welcome to my whack—and, say," said Marbuckle, seeing that he was securing his tool, "you shall have the extreme sum the Constitutionals are sure to give in the spasm of the moment. As captor of the Daltons, too, you could star through the West in all the variety theatres!"

Kohnson did not consider this last item any allurement, but he agreed to the rest of the scheme. The two adjourned to his rooms, where they sat up the bulk of the night fixing the snare for the brothers.

They concocted a letter purporting to be from Si. Jacobus, an affiliated member for spying purposes of the band, whom, Marbuckle learnt, had never been seen by either Dalton. It professed to give useful information for them in avoiding the banded marshals and sheriffs. Marbuckle let out some of the truth which he derived from his friend Salton. This was merely to open the correspondence.

In ten days it was followed by another epistle, more practical; it stated that a party of miners, who had done well, were to quit the main line to go down the branch to Fort Worth, where, at the insignificant depot of Malstrom, they would confer with an old prospector who professed to have lighted on a hidden lode, one of those traditional bonanzas whose stories are the ro-

mance of the Staked Plain. They projected buying shares, and when they had their carouse over would accompany this guide and old pard to the new mine.

While they were flush the letter directed their being plundered. The secret of the mine was another matter.

Salton wanted to ambush some men at the miners' ranch and fall on the bandits there and then. But Marbuckle insisted that the pear was not ripe.

"They are cautious. I do not believe for such a small haul that both the brothers would head the expedition. And only one of them would be no catch. I wish you would let me manage the matter, especially as you have not done anything wonderful up to now while going it alone. I assure you that this Jew has got his mind buckled down—I thought that you and me hated the Daltons some, but our hate is a flea-bite to Kohnson's. He is not a brave man, but he finds the courage for anything in his disgust at having lost his valuables."

So the bandits were allowed to attack the miners. They were beaten off at the ranch from the latter being forewarned, of course, by Salton, who thought the blind might go a sight too far.

But the information from the sham Jacobus was held good.

The next step was for Kohnson to prove his courage by venturing into the wolves' lair.

One day, while the robbers were holding revel in the cave, Arizona Jewell came in from the lookout and whispered to Cpt. Bob:

"A stranger wants to speak to you. He gave the sign right and he says you know him."

"If you have spoken with him, what is he?"

"Says he is Si. Jacobus and brings a tip of value."

"Oh, that intelligence-agent——"

"Is he an intelligent agent?" asked Frank languidly.

"Well, he looks a Jew straight enough—all but his beak which is as crooked as a vulture's. I would not trust such a face-wearer for a cent, but he is cut out to make money, and I suppose he sees that you will pony up his share if we land any event through him."

"Let him come right in. He has been waking us up of late. I should like to look at him, eh, Frank?"

"Yes, we ought to know our agents by sight."

Shortly afterwards, Kohinson was introduced into the cavern.

At the last instant, without saying anything to Marbuckle, he had changed his aspect. He was a Portuguese or "Black Jew" by birth, but he had executed a great change in his appearance by dye and toilet dodges so that he was now like a Red or Northern Jew. Before, he would have passed as one of the superior Israelites who are heads of banking firms; now he seemed one of those myriads who are shot into the States from Poland, and who as peddlers circulate all over the west, penetrating every hamlet, and even coming up to the doors of solitary ranches, where any face is welcome after the snows or the rainy spells. This one looked just like these, except that he did not swelter under the pack which most of them carry on their backs even where a poor horseless white would

steal a mule at the risk of the halter fitting him rather than carry truck.

He was plainly dressed, and his velveteen vest was not garnished with a large but cheap chain, such as his sort carry to swap at taverns and in smoking cars.

With his pale complexion, his foggy hair and beard, cut differently from when Frank had travelled with him, Kohnson was accepted as Jacobus and thanked for what he had already done late days to serve the sect.

"Glad to see you Jake," said Bob; "try anything you see to eat and drink. I suppose you are not so orthodox that you must not bite or sup in our company, eh?"

"Unfortunately, I am," said Kohnson, who had repugnance to breaking bread with those he meant to betray.

"Oh, are you too good for us," fired up Frank, who had no suspicions, but who disliked the race since last outwitted. "Look here! No crawfishing here! You have got to drink with me, or else we do not do any business."

"But—"

"You'd better! He is in a bad mood this day," advised Bob, instead of quieting his brother.

"Very good, then," replied Kohnson, submitting to anything to carry his purpose and talking in the vulgarest yiddish, or gibberish, mixed up with about as much English as would let him be understood. "After all, our regulations can be renounced when we are dealing with shentlemans."

"Right," said Frank, appeased. "I was not freezing for Jews' ears in my 'bacca pouch for luck at poker, no sir! Let's have some of that French wine!"

Warmed by the enforced drink, the Jew became communicative, after a fashion—his fashion, which was not frankness. He boasted that he was carrying on a receiving business for stolen goods, and that the foreign counterfeiterers who foil the mint authorities so well, made his place a depository for the bulk of their cross goods.

That brought him naturally to the subject which led him into the wilderness. The counterfeiterers, mostly Italians, numerous of his race, had gradually suffered the supremacy of two of their number who seized all the strings and had the holding of the gains. Whether these meditated treachery or not, the pretended Jacobus was afraid that they were going to do him out of his part for harboring them and the bad money when they "worked" the west, and he suspected they were to bolt to their own country.

As an American, he could not stand being sold by the Dagoes, and he looked about for assistance in a counter-scheme.

"An American—you? I say, you are drawing a longer bow than the Injins."

"Vel, I was Amerigans, rechts enough. I was porn underpeneth those stars and stripes on the ship coming over!"

That made all hearers laugh.

"As an American, then, you cannot allow the coun-

try to be deprived of the money which ought to be spent here—”

“Dose was goot for trade, don’t it?” said Kohnson with a subtle smile. “They mistrust me, and they are going to draw the cash from my house—”

“Ah! Where they get no interest?”

Kohnson winked, laying his chubby finger along with ragged nails along his nose.

“That interest wash mine for safe-keeping das gold,” he replied.

“So! you are evidently a wronged party, and I understand you’r just thirsting to be level,” said Bob. “I expect you know the route they are going to travel with this cash and you want us to intercept it?”

“No, Mishter Roberts, you wash off some way! Dose Italians wash too connings to carry moniesh like dot! They will put it in the safe deposit at Reno—”

The Daltons exchanged a glance of pleasure and meaning at the name.

“And when gold is at a pig figure, dey will draw on Paris, Vrance, and add to the sum to be paid them there.”

“You are a very good fellow, Jake! you shall not lose—I mean you shall make by this put-up. Any one will tell you who has done biz. with We, Us and Co., that we give the informer one-third the haul anyway. How is that for fair?”

“I always say dot dose Dalton boys wash shentlemens,” said Jacob Kohnson, as if delighted and overcome with the wine.

His proposition accepted, he thought to go away at

once but they held him gently but irresistibly after the drugged wine sent him to sleep to see at leisure if he carried anything about him contrary to his profession, but he had fixed everything so that in his unconscious state he deceived as thoroughly as his acting one. Frank saw no more familiar traits than any Hebrew would present.

Two days after, sure that he was not tracked, Kohnson rushed with a delighted face into the presence of Marbuckle and Salton at the appointed place.

"I have them," he cried, closing his hands, as if he held two men by the throat. He looked like a fiend when doing it.

As the Daltons had already dreamt of a raid on the El Reno bank, this proposition only hastened on their expedition, modified.

They waited but the promised letter from "Jacobus" to proceed to the spot.

It came and, from the supplementary information from Julia, the arrangement was held good.

To get over the difficulty of a large body of horsemen, well armed, entering the city without being challenged, Bob suggested a droll and ingenious idea.

One morning, all Reno was agog at the small bills, dodgers and posters, to say nothing of articles in the *Demophile* and *Spreadeagle*, announcing that the "Arkansas Praying Band," who had been having remarkable success in revival work in Missouri, had consented to open up virgin soil in the new State.

At ten they would ride into town, singing one of

their favorite songs which had brought the most hardened to their knees.

Punctual to the hour, from an unexpected quarter, over the ground appeared a troop and, with their followers, they took possession of the west end of the place.

There could be no doubt of the genuine nature of the preacher, Exhorter Biles, and several of the long-haired brethren were certainly Simon Pures; as for the others, who hedged them in and would not let the profane handle them, they looked to the dot such Bald Knobbers as they had reason to boast the conversion of.

It is almost needless to explain that the Daltons, on their way had met some religious cranks going west to found a new Zion—there is always some of them in the front—and had pressed them into covering their scheme.

While this irreligious farce was going on, collecting the idlers and a good many respectable storekeepers who ought to have been more dignified than to look on and laugh, the bandits who were with the two leaders as the prayers, pressed on and took up rank at the brick building—as far as front went—of the new safe deposit institution.

Besides the big black janitor, an ex-prize-scrapper, it had two robust men as guards. But when Bob and his brother, who had alighted and swaggered up with jingling spurs, answered that the word was “six shots a hand!” they wilted and the bandits passed in.

Thanks to the route told them by Julia and the false

Jacobus, whom they had expected to see in the town, but they had failed to connect with, they walked right on into the interior.

To the left of the lobby was the clerks' and manager's rooms, where they stationed as guards the robbers who had followed.

No resistance was offered.

The manager, hauled out rather by the scruff than other wise, produced the keys and stammered the combination.

The party went down into the celebrated safe-room, the wonder of the district.

The doors, massive and sheeny with polished steel and phosphor bronze, opened before the enforced passes like those of that cave in story to which one had only to say "Open, sesame!"

The shotgun argument carried all before it.

At the same time, like a gambler staunch to the doctrine that winners first are losers last, Bob wished that all was not quite so smooth and swimming.

Still, here they were in the great room, with treasure on all sides, so Julia and Jacobus had assured them. They only asked to have this enormous door opened in its two portions to finger the valuables.

"Open," said Bob and Frank in a breath to the manager.

He had the three keys in his hands, which was a suspicious thing, being against the rules, but that was not noticed at this critical instant.

He opened the massive doors, and as they swung as

if moved by some powers on the inner side, he shouted with all his force:

“Never mind me—fire!”

At the same second, the startled bandits beheld in the frame of the safe-room doorway, not the pigeon-holes containing securities, but a file of armed men, whose carbines were lowered upon them.

The heroic manager would be pierced at the first shot.

Luckily the guards were resolved not to hurt him and to take the robbers alive.

This hesitation ruined their case.

The Daltonists had no such scruples—none at all, for that matter, and they delivered a volley which, at such close range, did much mischief.

The unhurt of the bank-defenders boldly emerged and tried to drag the manager among them but this martyr to trust was already bleeding to death from pistol shots.

His quivering body fell at the feet of the retreating invaders who felt that they were entrapped, and, mostly men of the saddle, they were at sea on the stone floor and within walls banded with iron.

But the door by which they had entered was slammed shut in their teeth.

At a little, steel-grated wicket, which opened in it as it was banged to, appeared a grinning face—that of Kohnson, without any disguise:

“How you think and what you like of Jacobus now, eh? You come here for gold—you get lead! fire on them, boys!”

At his shout, as though he was recognized as a leader from his hardihood in venturing into the Dalton's cave, not only did those guards in the safe-room shoot, but, as the bandits fell to one side, not to be caught between two fires, from both doors, a secret panel and rifles were poked in there.

They saw them gleam, though the smoke was already thick in that confined place and the heat enough to choke.

This looked black. Three rows of rifles and a solid wall on the other quarter.

No wonder some of the bandits cowed by this fight in the pit, yelled that they gave it up.

"Never!" said Frank; "fire away boys! Bring down that traitor, anyhow!"

"Shoot!" cried Marbuckle who appeared at the panel, with three or four rifles, "why do you not shoot?"

"Go at them and do it yourself," said one of his own force abruptly.

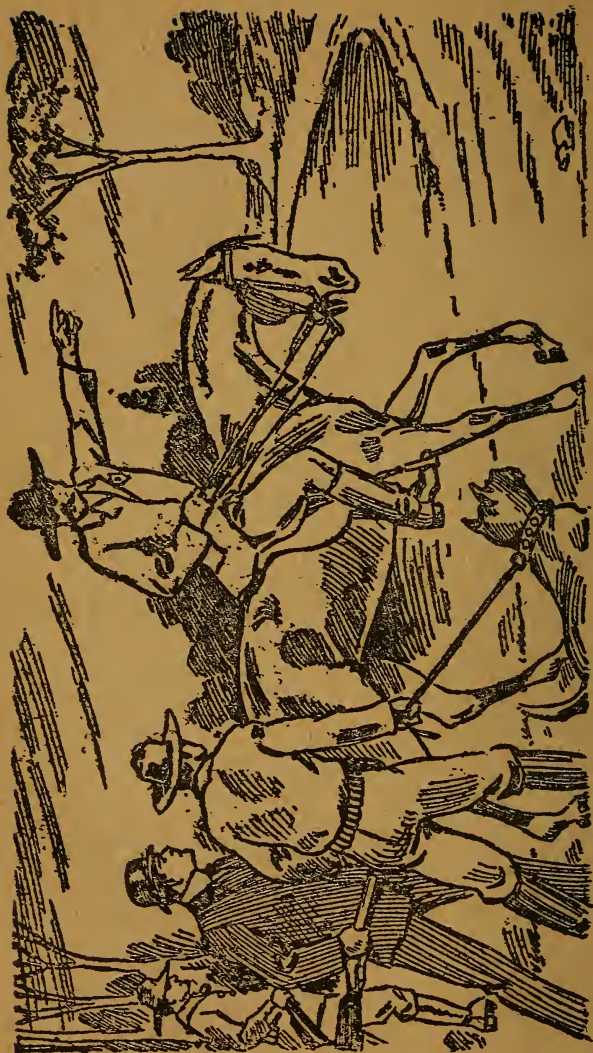
And with a sudden and powerful effort, the speaker seized and threw him by the oblong hole at length.

He received the shots the bandits facing the panel had aimed at the men at his side.

"Mercy," he howled as he rolled on the flags beside the yet writhing manager.

"This way, like steam!" shouted the man who had executed this vital diversion. "Do not fear; we were put up to it by Julia!"

At this plain utterance of his wife's name, Frank



leaped to the spot where opposition had turned to friendship like magic.

Beside the man who had spoken, one whom he recognized was a face in shortened hair like a boy's and attire to correspond.

"My darling!" he said. "Stand back lest you be slain!"

"Not till you come!"

Frank shook his head.

"Yes, go," said Bob, who knew why he hesitated. "I shall follow. The game is up! we must flee if only for our turn next time."

Frank vaulted through a hole in the wall with a side spring which would do credit to a professional acrobat, but his brother was stouter and had to be pulled through. Four more were equally lucky, though the last was badly beaten and almost pulled asunder.

Arizona Jewell was captured, unhurt from his girth not allowing his escape. Seven of the bandits, perhaps the hardest cases of the gang, remained in the bank vault as trophies to the excellence of Marbuckle and Kohnson's trick.

The saved ones dared not pause. Jule in her boy's dress, having studied the ground and having misgivings which she dared not impart to the others, had studied out the way to evade pursuit.

Under cover of a volley, which drove the assailants away from the narrow slit, the party did not stop to bind up wounds or exchange pledges of friendship, but followed the heroic girl to the next house where she had the walls weakened to give way to their united

exertions. In the next building, a cellar used as stores, they had no difficulty in getting out at the rear.

Like most buildings in boomer towns, while the front was of more or less solid construction and material, the rear was as flimsy as frame houses generally.

They were out in the street, parallel to the main road, where the sweepings are cast and nothing roves but the cat and mongrel cur.

Not a human being was in sight.

Subdued by the thick walls of the safe department the explosions had not resounded without. Had they been audible those in the knowledge of the attack would conclude that the fight was confined to the subterraneans, not that already the Daltons had broken from the death-pen.

"Make for the flagpole," said Bob, "in front of the shoe-store."

Frank was wounded, but he gave his arm to his wife, and she, the first excitement's factitious strength flagging, took the support in contradiction to her masculine dress.

They kept in the side street almost to where they say the tall flagpole topping the houses; then they debouched into the main street.

So quickly had passed the attack and the repulse that the praying band was at the doxology. On seeing their leaders and their beated and blood-smeared escort, all was divined. The converts threw off the mask and showing the constrained evangelists out of

the way drew weapons and formed a serried mass in double file to enable the Daltons to get on their horses, hidden under a shed at the corner by the butcher's.

Once a-horse, the signal for retreat was given and the bandits, like a military cohort, slowly retired.

Their determined front had made the faint-hearted, attracted by the religious ceremony, run to cover, and the main street was deserted save by a few bold hearts, who stood irresolute till they were informed of the true state of the case by the rangers, police and Marshal Salton, coming out of the safe deposit. They had waited to bind the prisoners, who had offered the most stubborn resistance as they expected the delay would be beneficial to their superiors.

Then began one of those long-range street duels not uncommon and awaiting their Homer to render them immortal.

Rifles were used as shotguns, but the mounted men were old border-fighters to a man, and their retreat was weary and careful.

To the satisfaction of most, they were seen clear of the town and going off over the brush at a canter.

Marbuckle and Salton, who had appeared late on the scene, were not sorry perhaps that they had not surrounded them, as by the specimen of how they could fight when cornered, they feared that their apprehension would cost the inhabitants dear.

But Kohnson was mad with rage, dissatisfaction and terror.

"You have let them slip through your hands and

what will follow? they will swear vengeance on the decoy—dat was me—and I live in fear with my own life! I go straight back to England!”

Marbuckle hastened to cool him down, while some mounted men rode off in pursuit of the retreaters, hoping to pick off abandoned wounded. But the wounded whose case was hopeless, were stabbed dead, and found so; at this proof that the outlaws were unflinching the scratch pursuers gave it up at dark and returned to report “no progress.”

“They have the woman with them,” said Marbuckle; “that settles it. As Delilah ruined Samson, spite of all his strength, so the band will yet be destroyed. The question is, how can we capture or annihilate these villains through the hold she has been given by the All-Wise over Frank Dalton!”

He did not say anything about the charm Julia still exercised over himself.

Kohnson had recovered his calmness; he grinned.

“I know what bait will catch a woman every time!” he said; “I will play for the fish next time with her.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN HUNT.

Salton had a feather in his cap at having organized the almost-capture of the bandits in the bank vault and in the hole in the wall, where the friends of Dalton aided Julia to make the outlet good, was pardoned him.

At the mass meeting held before the city hall he was complimented, and the charge of a company of irregulars placed under his command.

The resolution says, in elegant language, "This walk-over us by the Dalton gang and their sympathizers has got to stop right here, and we won't tire first, neither. As the governments seem to be cool, we announce that we are hot under the collar, and send out a first detachment to look after these murderers, thieves and barn-burners in our own plain neck-for-halter way. Go forth, Dick Salton, and put an end to this lawlessness!"

"That is the ticket," said the Terror; "if in a month I do not rout out these brigands, why, you can have my head positively as well as officially."

Kohnson thought that a real war had begun. He was threatened openly by friends of the bandits, and he wanted to go home. But the marshal said he should not, as he would be useful on trial to identify Frank

Dalton, with whom he had an extended association.

Marbuckle was in the same book, as he knew the brothers when they were honest and assisted to secure the homestead for their mother in Oklahoma.

They relied greatly on the enforced co-operation of Arizona Jewell, who was arrested in the safe deposit vault, unable to keep up with the fugitives.

Smithers suggested that under pretext of carrying him to prison they should take him along on the search expedition, and when he was weakened by seeing that without him they could do deep injury to his companions he would try to save his neck by revealing the way into the stronghold.

They went nearer and nearer to the spot, without having a clear idea of its whereabouts, but starting afresh from where the outlaws had attacked the gold train.

They took up the trail in earnest, old as it was.

By circles they struck the grave of the Vlites in the chapparal, heaped up with large stones, as Daltons had promised.

More than once they almost tumbled on the spot but the bandits had not lately come forth in force and the solitary traits of their videttes did not betray them.

On hearing that the trackers were so close, Bob ordered that they should lie perdu, not supposing that this was a determined hunt.

Accident gave him the certainty.

Kohnson imagining at any instant that an armed man would start up in the brush and blaze away, felt panic. All his wits were centered on getting away

from these regulators whose ways frightened him as much as those of the rustlers.

Snatching at the first opportunity he mounted a capital American horse which Marbuckle had bought as "gentle as a lamb," and rode off towards dusk. His only guide was to be the stars.

The probability was that he would have lost his life in the solitude, but his strained nerves would stand the prospect of meeting the Daltons no longer.

Gentleness is a comparative term; the lamb ran away with him at the first slackening of the reins, and as chance guided it to where its instinct assured it a good bait awaited, it took itself up to the southern outlet of the cave.

Seldon was thus used by the robbers, and never for a strange visitor.

So the sentinels lifted Kohnson off his horse with surprise equal to his own when he announced that he was with the column to capture the Daltons, and to humor the error he labored under that this was a camp of man-hunters, conducted him before their leaders without undeceiving him.

What was his horror when he was set before the brothers, who recognized him easily by the light of kerosene lamps with which the retreat blazed, instead of fires which might have denounced them.

The rogues had found an oil spring and utilized it to be comfortable and secret.

They were having a good time here. They had added to the cause of their amusement a party of five of these rovers, white diggers, the gipsies of Cali-

fornia, who were singing songs and dancing for entertainment. They were brought in blindfolded and would be so taken away—if they were released in the end.

They were made to strike a tune on their banjos and guitars while the Jew had to dance; a cut with a quirt from the nearest of the bystanders forming a ring around, kept him on the alert, while the two leaders consulted on this capture.

Having been danced into a fever, he was questioned as to the numbers and nature of this force so near the haunt. Frightened and jounced into a jelly, and let out a great deal, and had the impudence to threaten that his fate would not be worse than that overhanging his foes.

“He is a worthless cur,” said Frank, “let us cut his ears off and set him adrift afoot!”

“No, he may be worth something. Do you think, after hearing under his own hand, that he had penetrated to our nest, that they would exchange him for Arizona?”

“Why, Bob, what ever are you thinking of?”

“To get Arizona back.”

“But this scoundrel knows the way in! We should have to abandon this refuge.”

“I believe we must anyhow. This hovering round so near indicates that the jig is up on these boards. We must hook it,” said Bob, with a sinister glance; “but that does not mean that the season dissolves without a show of fireworks!”

“But—”

"This oil we have found flowing deep down is crude, but it will burn, and I fancy we could make it warm for those who followed Mr. Moses into these holes at his tail!"

Frank laughed, and soon after Julia begged him to let the intruder off with life, they said with all possible pretence of tenderness that they were thinking of nothing but humanity. They would offer him in exchange for Arizona Jewell.

But who would bear the letter from Kohnson to the hostile camp?

No one volunteered.

A flag of truce from outlaws has to be backed up strongly to be respected by frontier detectives who shoot at sight.

"I will go," said Julia at last, as the block to the scheme was complete.

"I am sunburnt dark enough to pass for a Mexican," she pursued. I will make out that I am wife to a sheep-herder whose husband has been caught by you together with the Jew. Let him write his letter. I will deliver it, they will not shoot at a woman approaching with the blanket waving the sign of peace."

Frank did not like to be parted, but he foresaw that lead would soon be flying thick, and he assented. He was reconciled when he saw how excellently Julia made up for the part. Plenty of the gang knew the type of woman she represented, and applauded her in the coquettish personation.

As for knowing her, Frank thought she might defy Marbuckle; why, she had gone so far for perfection as

to simulate a mustache on her upper lip, a masculine ornament which disfigures so many Greasers! It was done by dying dark the down which was only a grace on her naturally.

On seeing her so intrepid, and happy to undertake any task so that she were brought closer to him on all occasions, he said:

"It is love that makes you so bold. But I shall be near you to the time of executing the exchange."

Furnished with the letter which Kohnson was only too delighted to write as he argued that it would give a respite until some kind of answer came, the chosen eight rode out with Frank, and Julia not included as a combatant, though she went with them.

The communication of the result was easily managed.

If she succeeded in handling the message without suspicion, she would ride as if to her home and by a roundabout course meet her husband at a given spot. If she were detained, that would be suspicious and the party would have to cut off a sentinel or scout of the enemy to ascertain what had happened.

This is what upset all the scheme.

Not daring to trust Arizona on a horse, for even pinioned men with feet tied under the horse's belly have been known to get clear, they put him in a cart, containing their supplies. A man was set to guard him, who took good care to have his arms at hand.

The second day after they had fixed a camp near the grave of the Vlites, the guard over Jewell placed his revolvers, of a heavy calibre, on a flour barrel while

he adjusted his belt. Between his knees he held his rifle, a Sharp's.

"Sharp was the word," but Jewell had been playing 'possum, affecting to give in and perhaps escape the halter by turning traitor.

The duped man, hearing a voice outside the wagon, turned to have the remark repeated which he had imperfectly heard, when Arizona caught up one of the revolvers with his handcuffed hands, and uttered in a deadly whisper the well-known threat "Deliver up, for I have the drop on you!"

Mechanically he laid down the rifle, which he had no time to lift up properly to discharge, and at the same space of time Jewell fired and blew a hole in his chest.

Then, with that terrible recklessness of the western desperado, propping up the rifle against one of the barrels, aiming at the chain between the handcuffs, and stooping as he sat to avoid the discharge he provoked, he touched off the trigger with his bootstrap.

The bullet rushed up so close to his head that he could believe he had shot himself, and he did not feel the shock as it cut the chain.

Recovering consciousness, he felt rather than saw that he was free of hand.

The person who had addressed the dead guard was paralyzed by the two shots and did not realize whether he were alive or dead.

Rash as Jewell was, he did not intend to rush the whole camp.

While the smoke was still oozing through the rip in

the canvas cover the last shot had torn, he slipped out of the other side over from where the unknown was standing.

Once on the ground, armed with the brace of revolvers, he uttered a whoop of joy to deter an immediate pursuit and hurried toward the horses, squadded together at the west.

Smithers ran round the vehicle in time to see the runaway.

He divined that he had intimidated if not killed his custodian, and saw he was unshackled.

A running fire between the two completed the alarm to the encampment and surprised Julia and her escort, as they were on a knoll, or motte, not far.

They saw some sixty men involved gradually in the uneven struggle between their friend and the regulators, but they were a handful and it would be madness for them to interfere.

They saw him fall under the volleys and thought all was over, but it was a border ruse to have one victim more.

Smithers was deluded into going up to him; he let him stoop over him and did not move, but a more prudent man would have noticed that the apparently dead hand had its finger on the revolver still in his grip.

Indeed, this supreme shot was fired in the teeth of the marshal, who was laid beside his ex-prisoner; the latter uttered instead of the death gurgle a rude crow, and stretched his length on the ground next his foe.

"By the powers," said Frank in intense admiration,

"he measured himself agin fifty—he was grit to the toe of his socks."

But this valiant death did not serve their purpose.

Rather than waste the letter from Kohnson, they bound it to an arrow and shot it from a rude bow into the camp where all was confusion so that it was not noticed then. But they might be sure that the ground would be well searched in the day, and they departed to report the block to their mission.

CHAPTER IX.

A LITTLE DELAY

Migraine, who took command by virtue of his rank in the regular army, was correct in his guess that the Daltons would effect a junction.

But Bob and Julia, after waiting a little for any of the bandits who might also have escaped, to join them, were delayed farther by a little episode worth recounting, as it disposed of one of our characters.

Bob was so skillful a driver, and so well conversant with the country—one must not say the roads, that he conducted the wagon with an ease which made him refuse to take the led horse.

The cushion was comfortable and the change agreeable.

“What is the matter, Jule,” he asked suddenly, as the conformation of the prairie allowed the rider to travel beside the driver.

“Nothing, but it seems to me, foolish as you will call it, that I am haunted by the groans of that unfortunate Dick Salton! He is a whole-hearted fellow, though his office made him our foe. Frank always had a good word for him and said that if he had not made up his mind never to be taken alive, he would let him have the gain of his arrest if driven into a hole.

“Yes, Dick, was all good enough, but what you say

is curious, for I have heard the groans you speak of along the ride."

They stopped and looked around.

"Let me think," said Dalton, "it seemed to rise when I made the turnout take a leap for which light wagons were not constructed, over a fallen tree or a boulder—I have it!"

"Have it?"

"Or, rather, him! We have in here—" he pointed to the box which was behind him as the greater part of the vehicle, "some one who crawled in there for refuge when the school was in an uproar."

"You do not say that?"

"I do. Hold you the horse, while I get a pistol ready for the matinay!"

"No, no, Mither Dalton," came a woeful voice from the box, "I will come out without any shooting."

"Danged if you will," retorted Dalton, securing the latch on the chest. "Why, Jule, it is that Jew who tricked Frank and then both of us with the acid that licked up the diamonds! This is nuts, pie, and custard at that—a man could eat this feast if he had not a tooth left in his head."

"Oh, let me out, the cramps was on me in here."

"If I let you out, Methusalem, it would be to put a bullet into you. You are the cause of the death of several first-class men, whose little fingers are worth all your tribe. What shall we do with him, girl? This is a fair judgment on him for being delivered into our hands! Ha, ha, ha, to think of his stepping right into this case—his own coffin, and turning himself over to

us—to us whose happy home is nosed out and handed over to those red devils to befoul and probably—by all that is red! They have set it afire!”

The Jew in his narrow prison groaned again at the oath drawn from the robber by the sight he beheld.

At the back of them a column of black smoke edged by red flame denoted that the successful scouts had clapped the torch to the ranch in spite at having been baffled at the main prize, or to signal their success to friends in the neighborhood.

“I am sure that Marbuckle, who was along, suggested that destruction; he wishes the very ground I walked on to be crumbled by earthquake,” muttered Julia.

“After worshipping it,” added Bob; “but what about the Jew, for there is not room for more than him in that cubby-hole.”

“I do not care what you do with him,” said the woman absently.

“Oh, kind lady, beautiful lady,” called out Kohnson, “you try to care for me; spare me to go home to my own country and I send you the most magnificent of shewelry.”

“You villain, to track men to their death; to glory over their hearthstone cracked by fire of an enemy’s kindling,” cried Julia; “if every hair in your head were a gold thread, and on each were strung to their entire capacity the gems of all creation, I would not lend an ear or lift a voice at your entreaty. Deal with him Bob and quickly; we want to get a start on us! only don’t give him a warrior’s death.”

"I write you a draft on a first-class house of London for one hundred thousand dollars," said Kohnson, as much alarmed at the silence as at the woman's fierce reply.

"A draft on London might be useful to you and Frank," said Bob.

"I would not trust him, though a Vanderbilt or Astor endorsed the draft. There would be some trick in the signature, and the bearer would be put in arrest. Bob, settle him, and let his ill-gotten wealth be dispensed as fate wills. It would not do us any good."

"Dry up," said Bob, convinced, to the appeal.

He had pulled up the horse.

To the south before them, the ground took a slope, gradual, for the most part in terraces so regular that one might fancy that the ancient inhabitants had raised them in layers like steps of a gigantic flight of stairs.

But in one place, the work of a landslide ages ago, a steep road presented an easy means of getting to the valley plain—if one liked to risk the neck. The grade was such that even a horse and man would with difficulty stop if once an impetus were gained.

"He shall trot for his life with his master, the devil," said Bob, jumping down from the wagon while Julia held the horse.

He looked to the harness as though he were going to drive. He patted the horse to steady it. Then he went into the thicket and with his hunting-knife tied to a stick to get at the prickly pears without tearing his hands, he cut some of those pretty playthings.

With a natural rope of vines he strung a lot of these into a kind of net which, thrown over the horse, would dangle the spurry balls adown each flank. Bob had never read of the riderless race in Rome, where horses are similarly goaded with spiky balls, but his wit furnished the expedient.

"That critter will run as long as there is a run in him."

He went and inspected the lock to the box; cramped as was the self-made prisoner, he could not break out.

He returned to the horse, and, about to throw the novel comparison on the poor beast, said to Julia:

"When I say let go—let go, and like thunder!"

He motioned her to head the animal for the declivity. He let the net fall on the back and cried:

"Let go!" and whooped like an Indian to incite the horse.

The pricks of the cactus had been enough without the yells.

Divining some peril, Kohson shouted "Adonai! mercy!" but already the horse had been launched out.

Down hill from the first stride, each bound was over twenty feet and increasing. The wagon leaped after and added to the fright. The screams of the Jew who felt he was flying as at the tail of a comet were an added incentive.

The horse became a racer and its feet could not be seen to separate any more than the spokes of the wheels.

Half-a-mile down, the man was bounced partly out of the box, the lid of which split. He tried to get out

and roll off but the pace was terrific. The lookers-on just got a glimpse of his figure to the waist imprisoned in the elastic boards, when the carriage, detached from the horse by the shafts and traces snapping, was hurled to one side.

"Over the precipice, by gum!" said Bob, while Julia turned aside her glance.

The unhappy man, in the shivers of the wagon, like an Ixion on his wheel, turned complete somersets and disappeared in a gulf.

The horse, never pausing, continued to sail down the steep, spurred to the last by the cruel balls.

"I wish all traitors and blood-money-seekers had the same race to run," muttered Bob, mounting the horse which Julia offered him in silence which was prolonged as they resumed the flight.

The punishment of Kohnson had one good effect: when the scouts arrived at the top of the slope three or four hours after, they followed the wagon wheel rut and saw the Jew in the abyss, dead and a mangled mass, before they defined what had happened. This delay saved the two fugitives who reached the rendezvous safely where they expected to meet Frank.

They found him with but half his command; these were demoralized.

They had to display veritable talent as scouts to pass without arrest from the parties out on the chase. On every hand they had met the foe, and were afraid to exchange shots for fear the delay would let a reinforcement come up. They expected no friends; on the con-

trary, separate groups left to guard the rear or sent ahead as pickets, failed to connect.

The cheat in the ammunition was serious; they were short, and the leaders recommended the knives to be kept sharp and to be relied on. Bob said that he would use bows and arrows before he would give in.

Their clothes were tattered and their horses skin and bone.

They could not think of disguises as they had not a change in the whole band.

"We have not a dozen men," said Bob to Frank; "it is no use expecting obedience from those who have to eat crow."

"A bad lookout," said the other; "we are too weak now to attack a store to replenish our wardrobe or bread-basket."

They prevailed on Julia, with three as escort, to leave them.

"We are only a mouthful," they said. "We must try something desperate and you would only be in the way."

She went away weeping, and Frank felt grief as if he were never more to see her, except in jail or at the gallows-foot.

Bob himself was disheartened.

At a shanty of boughs on the southern plain they met a man breaking bread and sharing wild chickens with a shepherd, who said he belonged to a Mexican band and that his captain would gladly receive the celebrated Americans in his camp.

"I guess you are Mondosa himself," returned Bob,

haughty in his rags as though he were a king in his statemantle, "and I am second to no man!"

"Well, you two may have a can of Americans," persisted the Mexican, using a more vigorous speech as though acknowledging the corn. "We will unite to make a capture; if it be a Mexican, we will ransom him, and if American you shall do it. We will divide a third and two-thirds—this will prevent international complications."

"No," said Bob moodily.

"I tell you, I will let you have two hundred dollars, all I carry, till we meet again!"

"No, brother, I thank you, but we are not pards, and I have not come for charity!"

Frank approved with a nod.

This refusal was not low-down on the part of men in rags and without a charge in their rifles.

They still had three men with them. Two set on guard that night, woke up the third and told him to tell the chiefs that they were off in the track of the generous Mexican; they thought him the right sort and they would join his band.

CHAPTER X.

SAMMY SLIPS UP—TWO SINGLE-HANDED FRAYS

The man left was Sammy Lasalle.

He was a true man but savage in action so that his atrocities had helped blacken the Daltons.

"Sam, you have a tiger's heart toward the world but a watch-dog for us," Bob would say.

"Cap," he said abruptly in the morning; "I feel wrong at letting those fellows take their leave but I had sympathy with them. They were young men, and as the Irisher said: "Thank St. Patrick, that Oi wor born an orphan,"—no one will worry about them. But I must do something to prove that I mean well. I heard you talking about going to Californy agin. Do so; there are some rustlers in the Sierras, and in a year you would have a band round you. I will pretend to turn my coat and offer to guide the enemy to your camp. I will lead them in the other direction and so gain you time.

"But they will blow out your brains—that regular captain would, for the treachery when discovered."

"I daresay," rejoined Sam, carelessly; "that would make a fool of the school-master in St. Looley who prophesied that I would be hanged."

His sacrifice not being accepted, or he accepting the brothers' offer to guard the rear while he attempted to

escape, they resumed their hopeless march westerly.

They felt that they were the moving centers of bodies concentrating to them, although the point of their meeting was not yet fixed.

They moved separately to give a better chance if fallen upon, as their means of resistance was so slight.

Lasalle renounced his horse which crawled rather than walked and cut its throat, in accordance with Indian superstition, to serve him in the next world.

He jogged on foot, scenting that he was endangered.

Indeed he heard stealthy steps as if the horses had their hoofs muffled and knew that he was closely tracked. He saw the blouses of the Apache scouts and their regulation hats, something like the shape of those Chinamen are addicted to.

He hunted round and found a tree, sound looking and hollow. The entrance was at a height where he saw an insect bird hop in after ants.

It was too much for him to climb as the girth was not to be embraced; but he was full of devices.

He lassoed a tall sapling with a vine rope and drew it down; releasing it while he clung to the flexible top, he was whipped up into the lower bough of the large tree. The whole was larger than he expected it to be from the glimpse he had from under.

"B'ar, bees or rattlers," he muttered, sliding inward.

But he had nothing to fear that way. He merely disturbed a bird on the nest. It flew out.

"Bad," he said; "those Injins will see something is wrong."

Nevertheless, though the hovering round of the bird

was noticed and commented upon by the red scouts, when they and a party of the whites entered this natural opening, his presence would not be observed.

He heard them speak of their quest, and how closely they were treading on the heels of the bandits.

Some of them had lost their horses; most were sick of the hunt.

Sam found that the tree was rotten to the shell, in places, and just as discomfitted ones were preparing to leave the spot his evil demon impelled him to stab one of the horses, whose rump was nigh the trunk, with his keen knife.

He did it for the fun of seeing it caper, its rider, Marbuckle, thrown, and perhaps hoped to stampede the lot.

But the horse was too jaded to do more than kick and squeal.

"Fly bit," said one, seeing the blood bead the coat.

"Fly? you are not fly to it! fellows, it is a cut—a clean cut! who was larking with a knife?"

Everybody denied it. An Apache examined the tree to which the bird had already called his attention.

"Knife cut! man inside!"

At the same instant, Sam gave a yell.

They pointed their guns at the sound and some fired.

Just as he hoped, he was shot through the heart.

They had to dig him out; he had died game.

"It is not a Dalton, but one of the gang," said Marbuckle.

"Oh! they cannot be far!" cried Migraine.

They left the body in the hole.

This adventure had given the two brothers some time to get ahead; they were debating on their course at dusk when they saw an unknown force of horsemen leisurely proceeding on the trail in advance.

They expected no friend in any quarter, so set these down as enemies.

They forked off to make each a half circle round them.

Bob did not diverge far; the nature of the ground drove his poor nag closer to them, four in number, than he desired in prudence.

But he did not dislike their looks.

"Nothing martial about them," he thought. "I will have a dash at them. They must have a flask of brandy, if not a purse."

He rode on ahead of them and suddenly emerged from the brake right in the teeth of them.

"Hold up! I am Bob Dalton and the boys are here," taking aim.

The four were speculators who had been buying bones of the Indians and making arrangements to ship them to St. Joe.

They were green as grass and had dispensed with a guide from false economy and being told that the robbers were suppressed.

They had arms but not a thought of resistance when the unloaded firearm was presented at the eye.

"Shell out! do not fire, boys, they are coming to deliver," said Bob as to his friends in the bushes.

He took what they offered, afraid to delay with the enemy so near.

"Good," he said, pocketing without counting and disarming them; "you have given me no trouble! if I had not forgotten my whisky bottle I should drink your pleasanter journey."

One of the party had a good sum in his boot-top pocket. He was so happy at getting off light that he offered his silver-mounted flask, saying:

"You are a gentleman and you might keep this as a memento of our meeting. Only, if you are one of the famous Daltons, would you exchange something of yours as a keepsake for my Philadelphia fireside."

"Why, cert.," replied Bob; "take my six-shooter. Do not be alarmed, as it is not loaded—I never have a charge in them when I have the boys at my sides, as I might shoot one of them if the bullet went through the victim—these forty-fives hit so hard, and Lordee! how they rip through!"

The merchant took the pistol in awe.

Bob had notched the butt to prevent it from slipping. This gave him foundation for another joke to complete the terror he inspired.

"Has it k-k-k-k-killed any one?" faltered the other.

"Killed? It just has, some! every nick is a dead 'un, that is all," replied Dalton. "Haul off, boys! let them pass, Frank!"

He rode into the bushes and hid to take breath and drink before counting his gains.

Three hours after, it being too dark for the frightened strangers to keep the trail, they halted to talk the matter over and make up the kind of story they should tell.

They also related how they had deceived the robber, after all, by the secret deposits of their money and gold watches.

"A very good tale," said the principal, as all contributed towards the narrative of how they had duped the Daltons and saved their property; "we might sleep here, I suppose. A night is soon passed, and, for my part, I am not sorry for an adventure which will make heroes of us when we get it out our way in the home press."

"Do not forget this sequel, gentlemen," said a strange voice. "Stand—I am Frank Dalton!"

They huddled together as a horseman boldly confronted them out of the thicket.

"Yes, I have heard how you cheated my brother! I also heard where you stow your money and that you have no weapons but an unloaded pistol. Shell out!"

This time they were despoiled, and to the skin, for Frank meant to clothe himself.

"And since you are collecting curious of the Daltons," went on the robber, jestingly, "you can have this pistol to balance the other over the mantel of your smoking-room. It also is unloaded. Yes, you have been robbed twice in a night, you four, by two men, separately, who had powderless pistols."

And he cantered off quietly with a mock salute of the good sun-hat which he had whisked off a head to replace his own.

The dumfounded four looked at one another and, listening, heard screeches of owls in the gloom—it was the two Daltons calling to meet and congratulate themselves on their bold deeds.

CHAPTER XI.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE.

Set up in liquor, fresher horses and arms, the fugitive brothers made an attack on the first ranche they came to, heading south for Texas, with the intention to accept Mondosa's offer, if they could not pick up a band.

They felt so good thus equipped anew that they sang and laughed in the saddle.

"I believe that we shall pull through," said Frank; "and that we shall be harking back to the old stamping-ground to make folks pay dear who have not treated us square."

"Push on," said Bob, though they were going rapidly, "we are not out of the wilderness yet."

"I wonder how Jule is faring; that Marbuckle scamp would harrass her to the last."

"Think not of her—we have enough to attend to ourselves."

They rode through Bluestone Gap on the Kansas-Missouri, and replaced their jaded horses by two fresh ones at a station, waiting for road-inspectors who were chatting with the station-master inside his hut. They must have seen the difference in the morning."

They kept right on in the darkness down the easy

slope, riding across the country as the rangers used in the old times on Red River.

They might have been taken for their spirits in the dusk, silent and relentlessly fast.

They had good hoofs under them, treading with the sureness of the natives. They saw a train jog along, like a pursy comet.

"We are going faster than that, anyhow," sneered Frank.

"If it were taking us back to a town to stand trial we should think it the express," said Bob grimly.

"What is that? That cannot be the dawn," remarked Frank, not laughing at that jest.

"Well, not there—it is a fire, I guess."

"And another! are they warning fires to say that we are coming?"

"Not likely. But there flares one just where I do not like it to be."

"I know! consarn their carkisses, it is near our treasure-hole!"

"You bet! Ride! I only hope it is some of the boys there."

"Then Grat is with them—none but he knows where we hoard?"

They dashed on with redoubled vim, when a strange sound under their horses' hoofs made them pull short up.

"Thunderation! a made road! What, are we civilized round here?"

Bob alighted and examined the road, a real one, more by touch than sight.

"Yes, a made road—with scorix from a mine in the gravel. Those fires are some kind of a mine—they opened some coal mines on these railroads. Hang 'em! they spoiled this lovely land just to crop money for Eastern speculators who do not care what a blessed look these beauties wore before they upset them."

"Hist! we are pursued!"

They both turned in the saddle. From the raliroad line, where an engine smoked and shot up sparks in the column, a neigh of a horse or two sounded as if in rivalry to the locomotive whistle.

Other steam-whistles resounded in the distance on three sides; the similarity of the sounds seemed plainly to indicate a talk of the engineers.

"They are corresponding," said Frank.

"Yes, sir; they have arranged, the engineers of the lines and the mines, to powwow with one another. The question is, is it about up, or just a good-night they are giving one another?"

"Not being toot-ered in toots, cannot say. How are things looking now?"

"Bad. We are hemmed in. If we continue, we shall ride in to the mines."

"Well, we cannot turn back—a whole troop is coming. That bilk, Marbuckle, has raised all creation against us! That is the Paris and Fort Smith line to the left, and by George! the locomotive whistles are bellowing there!"

They looked at each other in despair, in the dim reflected glare from the fire ahead.

Pursuers behind, enemies on the railroad track, with

the telegraph to bring assistance wherever they tried to break through, the river to the South, the mines in the front.

The worst was that the horses they bestrode would surely be identified.

"We must abandon them," said Bob, with the sigh of a plainsman about to be set afoot.

"What will we do with our wings clipped?"

"Have recourse to disguise. Stain our faces and hands with berry juice, and tear up our clothes to pass for some busted foreigners after a job at the collieries."

"That is a hard rub."

"They will take anybody," continued Dalton, without heeding the remark. "They were saying up in the Territory that the niggers had left them by shoals to go there and settle. They will snap at anyone coming along."

"Just as you say, Bob."

"After a week, we can start again for Mexico."

Before them some low, thick chimneys vomited flame of all colors and masses of smoke. Shades of Crocket, Houston and Austin, how they would have shuddered to see this glorious landscape fouled!

"They have put Hades into a Paradise," murmured Frank, cross with everything.

They stopped at the brink of a hideous black pit, with ragged edges, whence had been extracted all the valuable minerals and now abandoned.

"Kill the horses and roll them down," commanded Bob.

They cut the animals' throats dexterously so as not to let a gurgle escape and pushed the bodies into the artificial crater.

In the dull gleam of the chimney light they performed the disgusting toilet, and on foot boldly proceeded up to the mine in full blast.

There was some noise on the sloping plain behind them—the horsemen were at fault, and were scattering to perceive the disappeared pair of cavaliers.

The latter had converted themselves into the likeness of a couple of the most dismal, fagged-out tramps ever kicked from under a lumber-car for stealing a ride.

Frank had grumbled, but his brother said:

“Better step it with your head bowed over a club walking-staff than have it pulled straight in the halter.”

Thus appalled and with smeared faces, they walked into the mining village. The whistles were sure-enough signals, for the village was in an uproar. The children and their mothers were at the doors of cottages, like English ones, with flowers in the little gardens and woodbine on the roofs and porches; the women and children were chubby, with rosy cheeks and fair hair.

“Why, what are these? They are not Americans,” said Frank.

“English, I suppose, or Swedes.”

He spoke to one of the women, who curteseyed and spoke in answer.

"Well, this is a new country," said Bob, "I cannot tumble to their lingo."

Some men came from the shafts, great giants with broad shoulders and huge fists. They were grimed and carried lanterns.

They walked up to the Daltons, who seemed but boys to them, with naked hands, as they would have done had the pair been armed with steel and pistols.

They spoke, but still the Americans could not understand.

One of them laughed heartily, more smouched with black than the others, so that his features were unrecognizable, and with an Irish accent too strong to be exaggerated, said:

"Faith! as sure as the name of me is Grattan, and him I took the glorious name av, was an illiquint patriot, these fornist ye are Cornish! the only Americans that spake United States are me and Emmet here—" A young man stepped a little out, his eyes gleaming humorously in his grimed face. "That's another foine ould Oirish name and Emmet was a paytriot, too. Well, as ye are no fugitives from justice—"

"Fugitives from sheol! we are honest men as your selves and want work, not shelter or charity."

Bob was exchanging a sign secretly with the two Irishmen.

The spokesman of the latter couple turned to the largest giant among the Cornishmen and conferred with him in dialect signs. He whirled round again and said to the riders:

"All roight! yees are welkim! Come along to our cabin an' we'll fix yes up complate."

The excitement calmed and the horsemen, almost regretting their having dismounted themselves, followed the two who acted as their hosts into a log cabin on the mountain side.

Three or four other miners came after and entered the hut.

The instant they were together, the young man calling himself Grattan made a wave of the hand and two of the miners posted themselves at the door. Hardly was this done before Bob and Frank threw themselves into his arms and of the one he called Emmet.

"Brothers!" they all cried with one burst of emotion.

These were Grattan and Emmet Dalton, and the others under this same bark roof members at times of the band.

Bob told his story and eagerly listened to theirs.

"Why, we heard that they were rounding you up. Do you know that the rewards out for you run to seven or eight thousand a-head; when it is ten thou., you won't have a show! What are we blackening up like minstrels for? to prevent talk for we found these durned coal-heavers right on our treasure hoard," said Grat., sourly. "We are having the all-firedest busy time heading them off in their following the seam."

"I see," said Bob.

"Whither were you driving?"

"Mexico! we have a friend in old Mondosa."

"Good! let us share the treasure and put."

"But we have such a crowd after us!" said Frank.

"Humph! that is bad! but I can do anything with these Cornish Sampsons. I will tell them that these chasers are bandits—the cruel Daltons, see! and they will stand them off while we are on the trial!"

Bob and Frank began eating and drinking.

"Say, haven't seen a buggy with a wild horse and a wilder man in it?" asked Frank with his mouth full.

"Well, there was something on the ridge like hades in harness during Texas Jack's watch," said Grattan, turning to the swarthy man at the door.

This was not the Texas Jack, of swell-hunter piloting fame, but Jack Moore.

"Now, you take a sleep," continued Grat., "me and Emmet will see about horses for the grand slope and we shall be off in the day."

In ten minutes, strong in their confidence in their brothers, the two hunted bandits were slumbering as peacefully as the children in the miners' village.

Once Frank murmured in his sleep: "Em is very young—'hope he will not share my fate!"

Was it a fore-shadowing?

The pursuers did not know of the mine, or cared not to ride in the direction. The united friends were not disturbed.

In the morning Grattan came with a woman bringing breakfast, and when she was dismissed, he showed a face partly smiling and part glum.

"Patchwork news," he said; "Joe Evans has come in from the Arkansas riverside; he says he has a string of horses which some half-breed friends of his

were running off. They will be handy at about morning, in the Little Pignut Hollow. He saw no sign of anybody out seekin' you over the ground he traveled. But here is the bad streak. Those durned miners, who think of nothing but work, are already toiling like beavers at a seam which will bring them bang into our hole where the plunder has so long been sealed up. They will want half if they strike it, unless they are so plaguey honest as to turn all over to the nearest marshal. Ugh! what fools these old country people are with calling the police in for every mortal thing."

"Well, that must be stopped," said Bob, rising fiercely.

"Hold on! these Englishmen are like bulls to handle. If they were as smart as they are strong, two hundred of us could not make them quit!"

"Before they or any set should enjoy our hard earnings, I would blow the whole into the open mouth of the man in the moon!"

"That's all right," said Emmet, who was the youngest and gentlest present. "But try if there is not some slicker way of working them."

"Well said, youngster," said Bob, listening to sense, and thinking that their mother would look to him if he sacrificed this Benjamin of the family recklessly. "Take the lines, Grat.; you know these diggings better than Frank and me."

Grattan smiled; he had a training in Californian wilds and an unknown depth of cunning; at the same time he relied a good deal on the chapter of accidents.

"We will turn them," he said. "Come on to work. Take all your things, boys," he added to the disguised bandits, "for we ain't coming back to this kennel any more."

The men loaded up, saw to their pistols and all hurried to the hills where the clank of the pick and the sledge on the drill was audible.

The outlaws followed the four brothers with a lively sensation. For some time the subject of conversation in the bar rooms in the territory and the different Indian nations' meeting-houses was the Daltons' hoard. The latter had always denied its existence, but nobody believed that they had squandered such large sums as the \$250,000 stolen amounts to in their several hauls at Adair, Alila, Wharton, etc. Their eyes glistened and they were more heartily with the Cuadrilla than before.

The English miners were hard at work, with that steady, slogging style which makes a "navvy," or excavator, of their nation inimitable. Their blows seemed to shake the rock to its centre. They had found a natural cleft and were clearing it out so fast that a dozen were invisible within the hole, except as some came forth with wheelbarrows of stuff to shoot it aside.

Frank lost color at the sight; Emmet was too new to this career to have learnt where the treasure was hid. The miners were boring to the very spot, might at almost any moment strike the crevice which led as a road to the cave where the spoil was stored.

While they were looking at each other, consulting

silently on their course, on the ridge to the north appeared a horseman, waving his striped blanket. He seemed an Indian, so dark was he.

"Don't be alarmed," said Grattan, who could make himself understood to the Cornishmen with old Irish words, these ancient nations having some lingual links in common; "I will see what it is."

He fired a revolver in the air to call the lone rider's attention to him and signaled with his arms for him to come down the steep.

After conferring with him, he said to the miners, whose chief was a dark man, half a head over his brawny peers:

"He is an Osage Indian, but quite friendly." These raw English thought all Indians were scalpers! "He says that he is warning the border. He has been pursued by banditti, who have allied the red devils to them. If they come here, they must be beaten off. Think of your women and children! We will guard this line, if you like."

The miner's ganger laughed, and working his biceps said in broken English:

"We do not care a hang!" but he withdrew all the miners from the horizontal shaft except those in the drift.

"Not taking all hands?" queried Grat.

"No, we are enough," replied John Bull with that confidence, which has won—and lost—many a battle for his country.

He marched them to the village and they saw him range them as a skirmishing line on the height above

it, commanding a view of the waste where some moving revealed to trained sight that they were horsemen scouting.

The so-called Osage Indian remained with the bandits.

"What is to be done with these diggers?" questioned Frank impatiently, as the men in the cavity pounded and shoveled away like machines, as if they knew their comrades would beat off any odds.

"Boil me if I know!" said Grattan, deeply perplexed, for they could not be shot without bringing back their friends and they could not be mastered hand to hand no sooner than grizzlies, which they resembled in bulk and power of hug.

Suddenly an uproar in the hole startled all. At the next second out rushed the miners, dropping their tools; they had pale faces and shook with terror.

"What the tarnation!" began the outlaws, when one of the miners, who had picked up a word or two of English responded with quivering lips:

"The spook! the bogey!"

Indeed, in the pause which involuntarily fell, a loud wailing groan was heard inside the mountain.

"Spook, ne'er a one—is it one of you maimed with the sledge?" asked Grat, rushing to the mouth of the tunnel.

"No, the spirit of the mine!"

Grattan paused at the gap and turned round while the most doleful of sounds issued from within.

"These beggars are masses of superstition," he explained to his friends. "They believe in ghosts that

guard the minerals; but something with a throat and pretty bad in the lungs is there!"

The same thought struck all the bandits.

"One of our men?"

"No," said Bob "we have not been near it for three months."

Then another thought struck the bandits exclusive of the brothers. "A traitor?" some one whispered.

Bob shook his head. "No one knew till now but us three."

The groan was heard again, so horrifying in its expression of more than mortal agony that the Cornishmen, with no more ado, just wheeled round and ran away towards the village.

"Good!" said Bob, laughing. "Come right in! man or devil, it is something in infernal pain and it will be a mercy to finish it. Anyhow, there is another way out, and this dive just suits us, in case Osage Tommy was chased."

The bandits disappeared in the subterranean. On the crest the popping of firearms was heard. The pursuers of the two Daltons, striking the trail of Osage Tommy in the dawn, had run up against the Cornishmen, who had not waited to parley but warned them off in their gibberish and began shooting with that heat and savagery which men are apt to show when they stand between their loved ones and before those they believe cut-throats.

The bandits seized the picks and hammers of the fled miners and removed obstacles to their advance. All the lamps were extinguished, but the elder Daltons

knew every inch of the way. At last they had to demolish a few feet of pipe clay and broke into a long cave, at the bottom of which on one side ran a sunken river.

A rough hole in the roof allowed daylight to stream in.

"A man!" cried Bob, who was in the lead. "Where's my gun!"

In an instant he was firing into the cave below where he espied a form flitting.

"You have brought him down," said Grattan.

"I guess not, for there he goes—there are two of them. This one is no good."

"How is this one?" responded a taunting voice. "Judgment, deferred."

And a shot flashed in the long hall, where the fleeing one turned and stood briefly, laughing.

Somehow Bob had thought to have had the powder-burning all on his side. He must have been struck by this bullet, but Frank leaped before him and received the missile in his chest. He staggered and rolled to the floor till the body already there stopped him.

He spoke not and moved no more, but from this other rose a lamentable appeal;

"Please let up, shentlemen! I have been robbed to the skin! Father of mine fathers, I shall die poor! Bless my soul, poor, poor!"

The firer of that deadly reply had plunged into the gloom prevailing at the far end.

"A Jew!" said Emmet.

The ledge was so narrow that they nearly fell over.

"Go slow," said Bob; "you may fall into that river! there ought to be rope here to help you down—no, it is gone. Well, all slide down as best you may—follow my line, and go slow!"

Somehow or other they reached the bottom of the cave, without sliding into the river, to which the bank sloped.

"Strike a light."

The Osage half-breed had one of the miners' lamps and the wick was ignited.

It shed a feeble ray in that expanse of gloom, larger than the strangers to it had thought.

At their feet lay in the last spasm the body of the man from whose side the other had started up and fled.

"Hello! it is that Jew diamond-merchant," said Bob.

Kohnson had been strangled with the rope which Dalton said was a means of descending the wall over the river; his clothes were torn open at his breast to enable the murderer to get at his valuables, which were abstracted.

He could not have recovered any way; it was clear that he had fallen through that gap in the ceiling.

That was it; carried like a new Mazeppa over the country in zizgag course, the whole had culminated in his being hurled off a summit so violently that he had broken in the thin crust over the Dalton's treasure cave. Without knowing it, he had been put to death within reach of a wealth that had never blessed him in his dreams.

"He has been robbed," said Frank rising. "Are none of you after that murderer, Bob?"

Texas and two others, one bearing the lamp, sprang at the stinging reproach in the pursuit.

"Better go along, Bob," said Grattan, "they won't know how to move."

"Better let them go," said Bob, retaining Emmet by catching his arms in the darkness, out of the sun ray and the gleam of the lamp going farther off. "We do not need the light and we can take the pick before we clear out."

"If they never come back on time," added Emmet, significantly.

The rest laughed, fully comprehending each other.

And clasping hands over the dead brother at their feet, they renewed the oath to stand by themselves to the exclusion of all the world which they held an irreconcilable foe.

The three in the secret hastened to a nook where the earth was replaced by four large wooden trunks; at least this was the aspect of them, in this twilight from that sunbeam; but while one must have taken them for trees, buried by the accretion of earth, they were segments, forming a rude and heavy door. It was exquisitely poised, however, and the proper lever being touched, one man's force was adequate to move it.

In a niche, on shelves and the floor—lighted by a church lamp of silver, from a Mexican sanctuary, burning in an incombustible wick of the oil of a large reservoir in the base—were seen innumerable articles

of value, but the ruffians' eyes fell soon on those compact buckskin bags in which gold in coin, scales or dust is kept, to say nothing of the wallets agreeably stuffed with bank notes.

As the four gloated on their rich gathering, the reward for their risk of neck and loss of honor, a sudden flash lit up the whole of the cavern; on this sheet of flame at the back where their cheated comrades had hurried to pursue Frank's slayer, these bandits were outlined.

"Cuss them for galoots," cried Bob. "Don't you see—they have broken into one of those pockets of fire-damp—and by the heavens above—towards which we are likely to be blown, the gas is afire for yards around!"

"Take the gold—?"

"Take nothing!" screamed Bob; "lucky if we take our lives out of this infernal hole!"

Indeed, the fire spread—the sluggish choke-damp pervaded the cavern, explosions burst on all sides from the more volatile gases, the bandits scurried to and fro, scarcely mindful of the stream.

"This way," shouted Bob, the coolest head in the crew, recoiling from the treasure hoard which a blast of poisonous gas was driving them from even as they clutched the prize—"all is lost, perhaps to our lives!"

Instinct made them lay hold of each other and blinded alike by flame and vapor, choking, they followed the leader into the aperture which brought them out into the pure air. They inhaled it with rapture.

The shooting on the village hills was silent.

"Those chaps have found out their mistake," said Grattan.

"Yes," added Bob, "they will all be coming to seize us, singed, smothered, lame with bruises. Where are the horses—we must die in the saddle! on the flight, boys—"

"But our money!" said Emmet, whose boyish fancy had long revelled on the hoard of his brother.

"Hark!" A louder explosion than any before was followed by the hissing as of a million serpents.

"The sunk river has run into the crannies where the fire raged and it is a spoilt cave for us; no one will enjoy our savings!"

"Then we are dead broke!" sighed Grattan.

"No; here are the horses, thank the powers. As long as we have a bullet in a gun, a knife in the belt and a good nag between our knees, the Kings of the Border are the Dalton Band."

They mounted in the hollow and were off as if winged.

In the far behind they saw the band of riders, who had been exchanging shots with their innocent defenders.

They could not but laugh, but it was a poor grin, thinking of the riches vanished.

"Who is that cheering them on?" asked Grattan.

Bob took his army officer's spyglass and peered through it.

"The coward who took off Frank—a scallawag named Marbuckle and marshal, who was hunting us.

I hated him before—I would stop to kill him now if I should have a fair chance.”

“He was robbing that Jew—will not that trip him up?”

“Why, Grattan, I do not think they would take our evidence in court to hang a rat! Oh, we shall nab him yet! now, ride, ride on.”

“South? are we going to join Mondosa?”

“Ne’er a join. We shall swoop back, and these loons shall pay for hunting us through the Territory.”

Towards evening, he sent a trusty hand alone to a station where could be telegraphed this odd message:

“Paris, Texas: Deputy-marshal Marbuckle reports that he has captured the noted train-robbers, the Daltons, four in number, at the Pisky Coal Mines; will bring on as soon as reinforcements and funds arrive; fear indignant populace will lynch.”

On reading this news, Jule left her place of security and proceeded on the line which she thought the marshal must take to convey his prisoners.

She had promised Frank that she would at least be one woman at his gallows-tree foot, praying as he swung.

She had two of the old gang with her when she was crossing the country where the Jew was sent spinning down the declivity in the carriage.

They left her from finding that their remarkable faces caused too much attention to be set on the beautiful woman they escorted.

She agreed, not sorry to be alone with her miserable thoughts.

She heard a halloo as she left her friends, but did not heed it.

She was not gone twenty yards down the slope before she found that she was pursued. It was but one man, and she trusted to her revolver if he approached too closely.

A panic however seized her steed and she could not hold it in; it is true that she might break its jaw with the powerful bit, but that would not have advanced matters—to be with a disabled horse.

“What do you want?” she called out to the lone pursuer.

Not a reply, though the horse snorted as if her voice were not strange.

Then it struck her that it was one of her two escorts; he had changed his mind and meant to accompany her, despite her injunction and his fears, which he had repented.

“Is that you, Casey?” she cried, with an odd tremor in her voice.

It seemed to her that the rider shook his head.

“Then who are you?”

A temporary lightening of the sky irradiated the face and she quivered with horror; it was drained of blood and, being of no beauty at the best of times, the aspect curdled her own blood. She felt to be as ghastly white as this mounted horror!

All the woman for a time had mastery over her frame; she saw nothing but this dead rider in her track and she spurred and whipped on her horse as much as she had previously tried to curb it.

The weird race increased in pace as the slope was sharper.

Her steed seemed to share the dread with her.

It bounded on, snorting steam through the nostrils, and its hoofs kept pace with those of the follower, which did not gain.

Thus the pair, as if coupled in tandem by an invisible bond, tore down and, at a break in the natural wall, swerved and leaped into a basin.

At the noise a man sprang up from ambush, where his horse, too, was lying down, and fired with a pistol on the oncomers. Julia bowed her head, and the bullet whizzed over it, cutting her horse's flowing mane and lodged in the throat of the dead rider in her track.

This completed the loss of balance in the corpse, it toppled out of the side saddle toward the man holding the smoking firearm and launched itself right into his arms, hampering him as he would have fired again.

"Marbuckle," said Julia, reining in at last, having seen the countenance by the flash.

She would have renewed her flight, disembarrassed of the dead cavalier, but Marbuckle, who knew the voice put a bullet in her horse's foreleg and the race was done.

He threw the dead man down and advanced to her to help her, despite her wish, off the crippled horse whose plunging was dangerous, saying:

"Ha, ha! you are my prisoner, my dear!"

"Like the others," she said, downcast, suddenly.

"What others?" he demanded in amaze.

"The papers said you had captured the Daltons."

"They did! Oh, this is some ruse—to cover their tracks—perhaps some new deed of daring! But never mind them! They are as good as settled! The whole country is in arms against them. Say, Jule, you were always a sensible woman—Frank will die soon in his boots—they will never let him stand trial, and besides he has sworn not to be taken alive. They can prove more than one murder against him. Listen—before these come up."

A mob of horses was approaching.

"I have a heap of money coming to me, and I can treat you to a tour in Europe. Promise to wed me as soon as you can and I will—"

"Marry you, monster!"

"That is the summum bonum of it, the gist—there is no other way out of it."

"What is the bargain?—let me have it straight."

"If my act saves Frank Dalton from the halter, you will go to Europe, via Canada, so as not to be bothered as witness if there should be a trial."

The troop were approaching. Julia, with a strange light in her eyes, held up her head. She put her hand in Marbuckle's which thrilled at the touch and said in measured tones, though time so pressed:

"If by your act Frank is saved from the halter, I will in a year and a day be your wife, Moses Marbuckle."

This was said with enough gratitude, apparently, in those eyes bent on his to delude him entirely.

Besides, what could she do against him now?

"My horse is in the oak chapparel down there; take and ride away. And in a year—"

She was gone, and none too soon, as in a few minutes Marbuckle was summoned to surrender by the horsemen.

"Too late! and you are barking up the wrong tree," he replied; "is there none among you who knows Mo. Marbuckle, whom Salton appointed deputy marshal?" and he made the sign agreed on by which the Dalton-hunters should recognize each other.

"Who were you with?" challenged a man, suspiciously.

"The dead," he cheerily replied, "I guess I grassed a bird you only winged. Casey, by Jinks!"

"But there goes a horse!"

"You are right—and it is mine!" cried Marbuckle, pretending furious vexation.

"It is a light weight—a boy or a woman," said a skilled trailer.

"A boy then—that Injin boy as was hanging around me in the town to be employed as a groom," said Mo. "Lend me that horse of the dead man—he won't want it in the happy hunting-ground, I hope."

All laughed, but none so merrily as Mo. Marbuckle—had he not the pledge of Julia to wed him if he saved her husband from ignominious execution.

"A year—she won't forget him in that time—but it will wear off! I shall be so rich and no one would mate with Dalton's widow. Live long enough, Mo., be rich enough, Mo., and no woman will refuse you, not even Julia."

CHAPTER XII.

THEY TAKE THEIR HOT "COFFEY" LIKE MEN

Marbuckle was correct on one point. The officers were conjoined with the citizens in pressing the desperadoes on all sides.

They could not have crossed the Texas line anyhow, and as for reaching Mexico, that "was in the clouds."

It was arranged along the railroads that help should be sent by special car to any point menaced, and the confederates of the boys were overawed from doing anything, as they felt watched.

The best they could expect was pretended ignorance if they camped on a farm, afar from the house so that the farmer might plead innocence.

On an October night, the three brothers were encamped in a dip in a cornfield, hidden by the stalks, as well as their horses, selected by Bob from a small troop he kept at this farmer's in Lickity swamp; about the owners little was said by him.

They were morose, saddened by Frank's death, and this gloom was shared by Texas and Jule, who was dressed as a man and kept aloof from the sod-masked fire. She did not weep; but her features expressed unutterable grief.

If Marbuckle had seen her now he would not have dreamt of a marriage!

"Well, Bob," said Grattan, "here we are like the mule between two bales of hay—are we to starve deciding?"

"Yes," said the other, "over yon, the Territory, where we have just a scratch to throw off the war harness and quiet down on a ranch, and end as farmers. Our kinsman Jesse, whose fame inspired our blood when we were green goslings, says that the desprit fellows' end must be bloody and quick. Wait," he sighed, looking out past their sentry by the horses. "I expect Joe before long, and he will bring spirits and news on which to base our start."

Emmet pointed towards the mourner, who seemed a statue of grief.

"We will send her to mother's."

Two hours after, none sleeping, the horses sniffed and betokened an alarm.

It was Joe Evans, who carried a demijohn at the saddle-horn.

"Whiskey?" queried Emmet, helping him off his horse and unhooking the bottle.

"No, wuss luck! Only alcohol out of the druggist, and I want you to be keerful for they might dose it up at Coffeyville."

"No, they are good friends there."

"It is alcohol, yes," said Evans again for the benefit of the sentinel, whom Emmet, replaced to be out of the range of Julia's reproachful eyes. "I could not be served at Remsen's, who knew me again, and he so irritated me with sulky looks that I just let out that he would hear from the boys—"

"How imprudent! I thought I could trust you, Joe," said Bob, testily.

"Oh, I do not think he caught it—he was in too doosid a hurry-scurry to git the winder shut between us; an he won't speak, boss—too much afeared his prison-bureau will be burnt over his head."

"Where did you go?"

"To Rumwell's, where no questions was put. Who is going up to the farm house after sugar? I take sugar in mine."

Jule rose and went to the house without saying a word.

"She is taking it to heart," said Emmet to the late arrival. "Don't rile her, but say the news while she is away."

"The news is that your fraud has caught on," continued Joe, lighting a store cigar and passing a handful round. "They believe Marbuckle has corralled us up at that Cornish mine, and the proof is that the express comp.'s have sent orders to pay by telegraph the reward for your head money. Yes, sir, the lot is at the National Bank."

The Daltons looked at one another without saying a word.

"They speak in the town of ye with bated breath, I tell you," went on Evans, with pride in his company. "It ain't many men that have had blood-money out for ten thousand dollars each!"

"And you say that this money is in the banks?" asked the leader.

"Yes, Roberto!"

"It would be rather a joke Joe, to go for our own reward!"

"What, give yourselves up?"

"Give nothing up! get the stakes—take the cash!"

"What! yank it out of the banks—"

"Ay, in the day, too! We can get there by eight. They open for the clerks to get ready by nine—at half after we storm it! Besides," added Bob, as a clincher, "you know that in the cattle movement month, lots of the ready is banked there."

The woman was returning with the sugar.

"Shake," said Evans. "I am for 'the sugar' every time."

They all drank as if they had not formed a serious resolution.

While they were carousing they did not hear the hoof-beats of a fleet horse speeding off from the farm. Jule seemed to hear it, for she smiled to herself, a pale smile that intensified the woe on her face.

Within the hour the bandits rose to take their departure.

"We are off on an expedition, Jule," said Bob, tapping her on the shoulder; "what is it to be—do you go to mother's, or to my brother's—"

"To neither. I am going with you."

"But there will be shooting—"

"I want to see it! I want to see someone shot who will be in the forefront—"

"What, one of us?" he cried in surprise.

"No, on the other side."

"You speak too mystically, girl!" shaking his head.

"Marbuckle will be where you go, to meet you—"

"That no-account fellow? Huh!"

"How do you know it? Besides, we left him south of the Territory."

"Never mind that, Grat. I am sure that he will be in the bank."

"In the bank? Are you a witch?"

"Better than that. I have contrived the only chance of safety you have. You will have to cope with only your number face to face."

"What, have you made a bargain with our foes—with the villain who shot poor Frank in the dark!"

"Go on! Let me hold the horses and help the hurt to mount and get away. Enough that I must go—for there I shall meet the wretch who shot my darling."

"Oh, the slayer of Frank will be present? Then that explains all; you shall come, girl!"

They mounted silently, the fumes of the spirit having vanished, and the ride was dull but for the breaking of the day.

They rode nearly due north between the Osage and Cherokee reservations and neared the south extension of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe.

In the meantime, a man who had left the farmhouse a little before Jule turned away, the sugar bowl in her hand, had outstripped them.

So early was the hour of his entrance that nobody was about.

He seemed to know his way well in Coffeyville, for he went straight to the residence of the bank presi-

dent. He was admitted to the magnate's presence as he was sitting at breakfast.

The name of the captor of the Daltons was a talisman.

"I suppose," said the man of money, "that you have come to see about the rewards. Be easy on that head; we have the express companies' orders, and—but where have you lodged the outlaws?—it ought to be safe for I assure you that I never saw the indignation of a community at such a pitch; they will be dealt with summarily, I much fear."

"They are not caught yet. That telegram was but a sham of their concoction. I have shot Frank, but the others are as free as the air."

"Escaped—"

"Never were taken; that is going to happen now if you let we rig things, and on condition—"

"My dear sir, on any conditions! the riddance of the community of these lawless ruffians—"

"Then I want the life of one spared—"

"Hum, hum, that is a grave request. Justice—"

"But this is not one of the men—it is Frank Dalton's wife. D'ye see, she is so overwhelmed with grief at my having popped off her husband that she would soften any heart. Besides, she has helped me in this matter—I owe to her the tip that they are going to attack your bank this day—"

"This d-d-day!"

"This hour, almost. So if you will give me a line for your cashier, I will run on and get a warm reception ready—"

"But, my dear sir, this gang will require an army—"

"Oh, no—they come but six, and Emmet is but a boy; the woman is merely to hold the horses, I suppose. With double the number they can be controlled. Besides," added Moses, with his evil smile, "the less takers the more money divided between them."

"Oh, there will be no stint of money from good citizens, Mr. Marbuckle," said the president, rising coldly, "for the apprehenders of these bugbears."

He wrote the line to the bank for Marbuckle's warrant, and was glad to see the grasping marshal out of the door.

Then, not seeing how he was bound to be tender with the bandits, he spread the news as soon as he was ready to go out.

Moses hurried to the bank and notified the officers arriving; he was so flushed up with his importance as the slayer of Frank Dalton that he disgusted the gentlemen, and as soon as they saw that he was bunking and wanted to be in hiding before confronting the bank-raiders, they proposed that he should be shut up in the safe-room! Here, the ventilator being open, he could hear what the invaders said and leap out as dramatically as he chose.

This conception was realized at once, as already the band had ridden into the town. They alighted at the mouth of an alley where Jule, in her masculine apparel, played the part of groom, minding the steeds. The rest guarded the street, where all was serene, or mustered round the three brothers, who entered the domain of riches.

It was better than half-past nine when they advertised their purpose by holding up their Winchesters and ordering all in sight to throw up their hands.

Like the liar he was, Marbuckle had assured the cashier and teller that he had a large force ready at his call without, and but for the president's prudence the day might have ended as disastrously for the supporters as it did for the opponents of order.

To gain time the cashier, quieting his heart-beats and preserving his countenance, with all the more credit as he had no means of preserving it from the guns leveled at it, said that there was no cash available till the safe-lock opened of itself—the time being set as ten o'clock.

"All right," said Bob, coolly, as though he were not in the hostile fort. "We will wait!" and he sat on the desk, rifle in hand.

The others proceeded to empty the tills of small sums and stow them in the swag-bag.

The minutes seemed very long to the prisoners, but at last the hands crept round.

With wild, ravenous eyes fixed on the gate to wealth, Bob and Grattan stretched forward as the clock pointed to ten—the massy doors opened of magic impulse and as they stared into the interior of the safe-room, there stood—

"Marbuckle, by all that is hellish!" gasped the two.

Involuntarily they receded. Here was the time for Marbuckle to prove the hero. But he held up his hands, armed with revolvers, so slowly that a

volley from the readier ruffian's rifles sped into his body.

"That one will not marry Frank's widow!" cried Bob, fiercely.

Ere the reports died away, a scream was heard outside as of an eagless.

"Treachery!" said Bob, looking over the dying wretch into the safe-room and seeing no signs of plunder. "It was salted for us! Out and off."

But a dozen shots were heard as they appeared at the door, and Grattan sank in the way, shot through the brain.

"On, for the horses," cried Bob, but, half down the steps, a second shot threw him in his tracks.

Instead of the quiet street, at the corners both ways, at store doorways and up at windows, rifles and revolvers were blazing.

"Emmet is leader," cried Texas, firing to cover them with smoke more than to kill.

"Emmet says—make for the saddle—that brave girl is firm to her trust!"

They had to run the gauntlet, but kept the marksmen at a distance by their sharp fire.

Emmet, wounded, was caught in the arms of Evans, who carried him to the horses.

"I have the swag," said Jack; "ride away, girl! they have downed Bob and Grat. Take it, quit, and may you live on it, happy!"

"Happy, with Frank gone?"

A volley of buckshot scourged the group and disabled the men trying to climb into the saddle.

The horses capered madly and whimpered with pain.

Texas was true to the gallantry of the state of his adoption—"Save the woman, at any cost!" His cowhide whip dangled from his wrist. He lashed Jule's horse with a fearful hand and away it dashed.

At the same instant, the citizens came up at a rush, firing as they ran.

Jule was alone in her flight, though two riderless horses dashed off with hers, for the sake of company.

When she looked back, the agitated group was as of a pair of wolves over whom the hounds were swarming.

Out of this sanguinary, struggling mass, a hoarse voice issued to give her a savage joy:

"Marbuckle has had his checks passed in!"

So she rode on, and on, with her dismal news, wearing a grim smile.

This death was all the satisfaction she had, but at least that villain had not lived to handle the blood-money and exult in the annihilation of all who condemned the name of her endeared one to infamy.

In the mourning home of the parents, they might recall, when time had softened the hard lines, what traits of valor, kindness and generosity redeemed the rash actions of the most notorious bandits of the Wild, Wide West.

